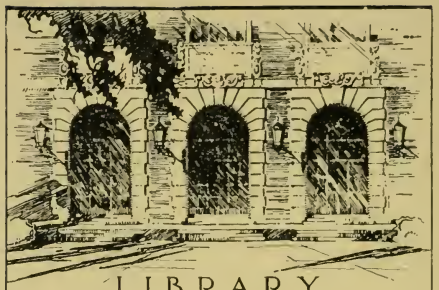

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MR. AND MRS. ASHETON.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"MARGARET AND HER BRIDESMAIDS,"

"THE LADY OF GLYNNE, &c.

"Be satisfied:
Something thou hast to bear through womanhood—
Peculiar suffering answering to the sin;
Some pang laid down for each new human life;
Some weariness in guarding such a life—
Some coldness from the guarded; some mistrust
From those thou hast too well served; from those beloved
Too loyally, some treason; feebleness
Within thy heart, and cruelly without;
And pressures of an alien tyranny,
With its dynastic reasons of larger bones
And stronger sinews. But go to!—thy love
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes,
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips, shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee, shall make thee rich;
An old man helped by thee, shall make thee strong.
Thou shalt be served thyself, by every sense
Of service which thou renderest."—*E. B. Barrett.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MR. AND MRS. ASHETON.

CHAPTER I.

TAKES US QUITE INTO BABY-LAND.

Who so fortunate as the Ashetons? They desired an heir, and an heir came. Royal houses, ducal coronets, titles of high and ancient families had all prayed for, besieged Heaven with petitions for an heir, and obtained nothing, or a phalanx of fair girls. The Ashetons had but to wish to have. It had certainly entered, with a small spasm of vague fear, into the heart of the little expectant

mamma, that girls are born as well as boys. And as she saw all the preparations made only for, and in honour of, an heir, what would be done to her, or it, should her baby prove a girl?

However, it was all right now. She lay pale, but inexpressibly happy, for every one agreed with Dr. Ford, "it was the finest boy they had ever seen."

No, not every one. The new papa was, and continued to be, bitterly disappointed. Certainly his experience of the beauty of babies was small. In fact, he had none, he did not know that he had ever seen a child less than a year old, until he saw his own. He may be pardoned for thinking, it was almost impossible to conceive anything with Asheton blood in it, so red, so ugly, so sleepy, so thirsty, so fond of squalling. For he could not discover that his heir had any other peculiarities about him than the above mentioned, unless it

might be the trifling amusement, when he was said to be awake, of making curious grimaces.

Godfrey put all his books upon education back on their respective shelves. He locked up his sister's letters, and he dismissed all idea of commencing the training of the "Finished Man" for the present, gladly leaving him to the entire care and supervision of his doting mamma. And he obeyed an oft-expressed wish of his father's, that he would interest himself about country affairs, and take his proper place among the gentry, as one of Her Majesty's justices of the peace. He had a sort of idea in his mind, it would be as well to study human nature a little more, ere he commenced the great work of producing a model for mankind.

Meantime, in the eyes of old Mr. Asheton, and secretly in the heart of Mrs. Asheton, though she did not allow it, there never was

seen so pretty a sight as Marion and her boy.

The girlish happiness that had so charmed the old gentleman on his first acquaintance, returned to her eyes and mouth, making the former quite refulgent, and the latter breaking out into fresh dimples every day.

The doubt, the hesitation, the slight shadow of an inward sadness, that had fallen on her gay spirit, on her acceptance of Godfrey Asheton as her husband, and which continued to the birth of her child—all were gone. She was the mother of the finest boy that ever was seen, and he was an Asheton. Henceforward she was one of them. That bugbear of a "separate maintenance" that had sunk into her heart, spite of all her bravery towards Beatrice, vanished. Godfrey might be displeased, angry, but as for separating from the mother of his boy, that was impossible. Did she not pour upon his son a shower of addi-

tional kisses on discovering the faintest outline of an eyebrow that promised to take the same form as his father's? Did she not upbraid that darling, dearest, loveliest of little pets, because, when he did open his eyes, all good judges pronounced them blue, and she thought him "so naughty" not to have his own best papa's beautiful black ones?

In fact, judging by herself, she felt she loved her boy most, because he was her Godfrey's son. She grew prettier and fairer every day under this new pleasure; and had Mrs. Trevor come down upon her with the whole mountain of her smothered wrath and indignation, she would have emerged bright and smiling as ever from beneath it. Greatly to that worthy lady's disgust, it seemed likely that, in consideration of Marion's amiable conduct in giving the Ashetons an heir, all her former sins were to be ignored.

Old Mr. Asheton had forgotten everything,

but that his May Flower was as the very light of his eyes.

Mrs. Asheton passed by, or glossed over, any little hints about it.

Godfrey apparently remembered nothing.

But this indifference should have an atonement. A day of reckoning was imperative, and would be all the heavier the longer it was delayed.

"Does he not grow, grandpapa?" asked Marion, as she held up her two months' old boy to have his morning kiss.

"Wonderfully, most wonderfully, my May," answered the delighted old gentleman; "and his eyes, yes—the very colour—they will be yours exactly, pretty one."

"Ah, so naughty of him to have blue eyes; but his hair, father, is very, very dark; nurse thinks it will be the exact colour of Godfrey's."

"That is well, my love; if it pleases the

Almighty to give my Godfrey any more children, I trust they may all blend the father and mother together—I shall love them all the more."

"Nurse says she never saw any child so intelligent at his age. Will you hold him, grandpapa, and you see he will follow me with his eyes all round the room."

This little conversation will prove to the world at large, and my readers in particular, that Mr. Godfrey Asheton had no real reason to be so dissatisfied with the embryo of the "finished man."

"My May Flower," said Mr. Asheton, after half an hour of this interesting confabulation, "I have a letter for you. My poor little dear grand-daughters kindly write to their old grandfather now and then, and as far as I can judge, this must be meant for you. The letter to me has been supervised by their governess, but this appears to me to

have been some spontaneous epistle of their own."

It was a remarkable document, considering that it was the production of young ladies so faultlessly educated; and appeared to be written, sentence by sentence, one after the other, by the little girls, on a leaf torn from an old copy-book :—

"Dear Aunt May,

"Emma and I are very glad to hear that you have given us a little cousin, and Etta and I hope that he is not at all like Edward. Emma says, will you give him a kiss from us, with our love. Etta thinks him a lucky cousin, because he will have chocolate and cake with grandpapa. I daresay our new cousin always speaks the truth—yes, because he is Aunt May's child. We are not very good yet, but Emma is the best. No,

indeed, for Etta was whipped rather than say what Aunt May does not like.

"We are,

"Your little fond nieces,

"EMMA AND ETTA."

"Poor little pets," said their old grandfather, "I never gave them their presents to this day; for though my dear Ellinor selected an 'Arrowsmith's Atlas' for one, and the new edition of 'Johnson's Dictionary,' for the other, I misdoubt me but they would have liked waxen babies best, so I did not consider them as my presents."

"Their new cousin must send them presents, grandpapa; and as he came from the Fairy Land of Happiness and Delight, he can only choose the toys made there."

"A pretty idea, my pet. Here is my purse. I will willingly be the banker of my fine boy."

"My cousin Prissy and I are going with baby and nurse for a drive. We will see what toys N—— produces, if you please, father."

We have, in the interest of the new heir of Asheton Court, rather lost sight of the amiable Prissy, a great favourite with all who really know her.

If anyone rejoiced over the birth of May's baby, it was Prissy.

If anyone had known for a certainty it would be a boy, of course it was Prissy. Though, for her part, if it had been a girl, she would have loved it all the same—it was Marion's baby. But some people are so foolish as always to set their hearts upon having a boy, and as May always did just the right thing, why, of course, it was a boy.

In writing to inform Beatrice of the joyous event (who had long ago departed to her Italian relations), she was so impressed with

the idea that everyone would of course know it was a boy, she did not discover, until reading her letter over to correct the spelling (Mrs. Flower and Prissy were not clever at spelling), that she had never mentioned what it was.

Prissy observed signs and wonders in the Asheton baby that even escaped the fond notice of his mother and nurse. If he yawned, "Did you ever see anything so natural?" cried Prissy, "he might be six years old, at the least." Did he smile, "What a darling! he will be bursting out laughing soon."

"Nurse says that when babies smile so young, Prissy, it is because they are thinking of the heaven which they have just left."

"Law!" answered Prissy, gazing at baby with awe and respect, "well, he is quite a little angel, you know, so no wonder."

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK BEFALLS SIR ROBERT FANE.

It pleased the Fates about this time to remind Mrs. Trevor of the necessity there now was for a Trevor Castle, and she plunged into all the delights of building, planning, and altering, to the banishment of every other idea.

It, happily, was a talent with her, whatever was to be done, she understood thoroughly how it was to be done, and

no matter at what sacrifice, she gave herself up to the matter, until it was done.

These sorts of one-idea'd people are great nuisances for the time being. They can think of, talk about, and dream of nothing but the one fact that is absorbing themselves, and are surprised and irritated if you are not as enthusiastic as they are.

Thus, the birth of the young heir faded in importance to the creation of Trevor Castle; and quitting Mannering Hall, the Trevor's established themselves, as near to the important work as a tidy abode could be found.

Godfrey visited them very often; sent for on any important matter for consideration by Mrs. Trevor.

The question of building a house according to the fortune that is ready to sustain it, was not mooted by Mrs. Trevor. Her husband ventured a remonstrance now

and then, and Godfrey hinted that the estate itself was two small in acreage to require a baronial castle. But the architect had his ideas upon the matter, which, it need hardly be said, were to fool Mrs. Trevor to the top of her bent.

The nature feminine is, when characterised by energy, of such an impetuous sort, that steam engines and express trains are slow to them. Mrs. Trevor began to weary of the length of time the walls were rising in her new mansion; the dull details of so many feet of bricks, stone, and mortar proved too much for her.

She began to think of something else. She had never seen her brother's boy, now nine months old. She heard it was a very fine child; it was about time she went to judge if they were bringing him up properly. Also she had yet that debt of wrath to fling upon Mrs. Godfrey Asheton's head,

and a dutiful fit took possession of her. It was very long since she had seen her father and mother.

Just as all her preparations were made, her plans settled, the works of Trevor Castle placed on such a footing that they could progress without the assistance of her vigilant eyes, a circumstance occurred, unforseen, unaccountable.

Strange as it was for one born an Asheton to do such a thing, before the proper time for an Asheton to grow sick and ailing, Lady Fane broke a blood-vessel in her lungs, and was for some time in a precarious state.

She had not expressed any wish to see her sister, but Mrs. Trevor, labouring under the idea that the whole thing was a mistake, and that her presence was necessary to put an end to any such nonsense, came on the instant, accompanied, of course, by her amiable husband and accomplished girls.

Disinterested parties must be informed that

Mrs. Trevor had another motive, not even acknowledged to herself. It was very seldom that, in the course of her life, she had ever desired a thing that she did not get it. But there was one, now become a master passion, from the fact of never having even had the chance of gratifying it, that sped her on the wings of hope to Rollinston Court. She was dying to have a short and decisive control over that utterly spoilt child, Edward Fane.

Of course, in his mother's present sad condition, he would no longer be able to avail himself of the shelter of her dress; he would probably be banished her presence;—what an opportunity for Mrs. Trevor's salutary and most necessary reform!

But she miscalculated the love of the mother. Lady Fane did not care whether she died or not, apparently; but she did care never to have her darling out of her sight, except for the exercise necessary for his health. And

then he was so carefully guarded by two servants, that were as likely to tell Mrs. Trevor to mind her own business and leave them to perform theirs, as not, that it was useless placing herself within the power of such an insult.

Though he could no longer hide himself in the folds of his mother's dress, the curtains of her bed were yet more favourable, and Mrs. Trevor was perpetually being startled by his little wizard eyes peering out at her, first on one side, and then on the other; besides knowing from ocular demonstration, that he was inventing quite a new series of faces for her especial benefit.

The hope of having one short favourable moment which she could use for the benefit of the moral improvement of Master Fane, dragged Mrs. Trevor on through the autumn months, with occasional short flying visits to Trevor Castle—that is, what there was of it.

Lady Fane's illness was of that delusive kind, which made the hope of one day but the sport of the succeeding one.

There was one person who looked upon the Trevor invasion pretty much as the ancient Briton regarded the incursions of Danes and Normans, Saxons and Picts.

After frankly informing Mr. Trevor that, as he had brought his whole family with him for an indefinite time, he was happy to retain their company as lodgers, not visitors, Sir Robert intended to make the best of this incursion on to his private kingdom. But Mrs. Trevor, tolerable as a visitor, was intolerable as a permanent inmate. Every maxim of courtesy and politeness, every code of hospitality and forbearance, every palliative of reason and common sense, faded into one strong determination to get rid of her somehow, no matter if the doing thereof caused a permanent quarrel.

Just as he had arranged the mode of effect-

ing this desirable object, all was upset by Mrs. Trevor asking him a very commonplace question.

"Robert, where do you mean to reside, when you have to leave Rollinston Court?"

"What do you mean?" asked he, breathless.

"Of course, you know, Godfrey expects another child in the spring; I have engaged to go there, to spare my mother any anxiety."

Had he not been dreading this very announcement? The impossibility of making an enemy of one who was not wrong when she asserted her brother would do nothing without her advice, made him swallow his anger and disgust. "Cecilia is almost well now," added Mrs. Trevor; "we shall have no east wind this winter." But the winter cruelly belied her. Determined not to be baffled by the east wind, she remained with her sister until warmer weather en-

sued, and so far got her own way, that Lady Fane began at last visibly to grow stronger.

"Of course," wrote Mrs. Trevor to her mother, "I, from the first, told them how it would be. Now that Cecilia sees the folly of adhering to the doctor's orders instead of mine, there is some hopes of her getting stronger. But when she persisted in remaining in her room during that fine brisk frost (really the best frost we have had for years, the river was quite frozen over) she could not hope to amend. My girls delighted in it, and ran about in their summer frocks (we had only brought our muslins with us, not expecting to stay so long, but I am always ready to devote myself to those who need it) just as if it was May. Emma is a little lame from chilblains, and Etta has a roughness of skin which I believe servants call 'a chapped

skin.' But what is that to the health and strength they are gaining? As I tell them, the summer will set all those things straight. I am only grieved I am a prisoner to the house, from a slight sprain in one ancle, which I think arose from standing a long time by Cecilia, persuading her to cut off Edward's hair. Really it is impeding his growth. But, however, to return to my first subject, Cecilia is, I am happy to say, out to-day for the first time, in the chariot, and it is as lovely an April day as I ever saw. I think I may now safely leave her, which you may be certain I should not do as long as I saw my presence was necessary. I hope to find you all well at Asheton Court, and look forward to being able to give Marion much valuable advice. I should decidedly prevent young Rupert from walking at all. Indeed, I was quite surprised to hear

that he was allowed to do so at nine months old. Pray, put a stop to it. Think of Godfrey's feelings, should his son be bow-legged. But I shall so soon be with you, that I need say no more. I shall be in ample time, I can assure you, my dear mother, so pray do not consider it necessary to be anxious."

But for once Mrs. Trevor was wrong. A letter crossed hers on the road, announcing the arrival of Godfrey's second child.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Trevor, pettishly, as she read the letter containing the news, at breakfast, "it is over."

"What?" said Sir Robert, who could not for worlds have said another word.

"Marion's confinement."

Fortunately Mr. Trevor asked the very question Sir Robert had not nerves to put.

"A boy! I am sure I don't know—read for yourself, Trevor, if you are curious. For

my part, I shall not now go to Asheton Court for some months. I only settled to do so to relieve my mother, and the event being over, of course there is no further anxiety. People of Marion's stamp always recover so unbecomingly soon."

Sir Robert had snatched the letter, as she tossed it to Mr. Trevor, and read it before that worthy had adjusted his eye-glass, for, in addition to other awkwardnesses, Mr. Trevor was short-sighted.

"I am sorry, my dear Ellinor, that we must part. I shall take Cecilia to the sea, and let this house have a thorough airing."

He could afford to quarrel with her now, he was not deposed—a reprieve was given. The letter announced the birth of a daughter.

"I think you will find the sea very unwholesome for her, Robert; and when I am gone, there will be no one to see that she is quiet

and kept free from annoyances. I had better take Edward and his nurse with me to our cottage in Cornwall, if we really find it necessary to leave Rollinston."

"It is absolutely necessary, Ellinor; I shall wish the house cleared by Monday; this is Wednesday. I should have thought you were thoroughly aware that Edward and his mother are not to be separated by fingers of mortal mould, or wishes of human lips. Good-bye. I am obliged to leave home for a few days, and may be prevented returning in time to say so. Thank you for all your care. Trevor, have a cigar?"

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH AN INNOCENT DOVE MAKES A COMPACT WITH A WORLDLY-WISE RAVEN.

THE elation of Sir Robert's spirits may be judged by the daring intrepidity with which he made this polite offer to Mr. Trevor. In his present state of hilarity, he was ready to laugh when he recalled Mr. Trevor's pale look of amazement, and Mrs. Trevor's indignant flush of disgust.

It would have fared but indifferently with Sir Robert had he been called upon to give up

the Rollinston estates this year. An unlucky bet or two had made a hole in the next year's receipts, and the expensive luxuries necessary for Lady Fane, during her long and harassing illness, were a great pull upon a purse already almost empty.

"I really thought I should have to accept that offer of consul in one of the colonies, leaving my wife and her brat to be taken care of by her own people. And I fancy cutting my throat would be more judicious, and save me a vast quantity of unnecessary vexation and trouble—at least from all I can learn of the pleasures of life out there. This narrow escape must really be a warning to me. As that —(here we will not quote Sir Robert's words, merely saying who the person he designated in language we refrain from using was)—Mrs. Trevor does not go to Asheton, I shall take Cecilia there, and get them to keep her and the boy for three months, under pretence of

papering and painting this house. I must retrench somehow. If I could save a couple of thousands, and have a little bit of luck with it, I might not care for the birth of this boy, for a boy they will have, I'll stake my right hand against my left, sooner or later.

"Fool that I was not to begin at once. I made an ass of myself thinking that jealous girl would cause mischief between them somehow. Yet it rarely fails. Once a woman makes up her mind to evil, she goes ding-dong at it until 'tis done, and I'll bet a cool hundred Miss Beatrice Flower never intends to forgive her cousin for usurping her place. I know what I will do—I'll go and stop at Asheton Court with Cecilia for a while, and see if there are hopes of incompatibility of temper, quarrels, separate maintenance. My opinion of Godfrey is, that he would leave his pretty little wife as soon as look at her, if she did anything of which his high mightiness did not

approve. So long life to him, and may he be as captious as a two year old filly at starting."

Lady Fane appeared to take a new lease of life in her native air, under the roof in which she was born; and as we have not been there since Rupert's birth, now a fine spirited, independent fellow, nearly two years old, we will see what changes have taken place.

Old Mr. Asheton has become aged, but there is a wonderful calm and serenity in his fine old countenance. From beneath his hoary brows, beam eyes yet youthful in their sparkle of pleasure. For Marion is showing him the little new granddaughter, who opens dark eyes upon him in staring unconsciousness.

"See, grandfather, she is a true Asheton, both dark eyes and dark hair."

"If you are pleased, May Flower, I am glad. But do not ask me to love her, my dear, as I do little Rupert."

Mrs. Asheton looked, if anything, younger, while Godfrey was now and then heard to whistle! Sociable, lively, and agreeable, met at all hours coming out of the nursery, asking for Marion whenever he did not happen to see her—alas! for Sir Robert, those ancient and historical characters, Darby and Joan, could never have been on more delightful terms.

But to do him justice, as became a true man of the world, he could not but wish confusion to her enemies and triumph to herself, so lovely was Marion.

She had become a beautiful woman. Graceful she always had been, but now there was a dignity, a self-possession, that no Asheton among them might hope to rival.

Bent upon doing the agreeable to all, with a sort of conviction rising in his mind (upon which he was strongly inclined to make a bet), that Marion would eventually possess a greater

influence than Mrs. Trevor, and the natural consequence was, she would use it to much better purpose, Sir Robert spoke thus to Mr. Asheton :—

"Why don't you have her picture taken with her boy? My dear sir, no painter can ever find two more beautiful subjects. Look at her now, as she holds him up for you to see. He is a splendid fellow, and beautifully got up. I'll bet anything, Godfrey, it would make an artist's fortune, such a subject, calling it a 'Woman's real Vanity,' It would take immensely. He is dressed with such care, his curls so artistically arranged, and she all in disorder, with those few rose-leaves scattered in her hair by that young Hercules, and that little white frill round her throat, torn, I think. She cares nothing for her own appearance, only for her boy."

Mr. Asheton listened delighted; but Godfrey called to Marion—

"Give Rupert to me. I think you are not aware how he has disarranged your dress; some one might call."

But Rupert liked being in the open air, throwing rose-leaves over his pretty mother, and pouted a disdainful refusal to his commanding papa. Godfrey was about to enforce his order, but Marion had whispered some little word to her boy, and he was already holding out his willing arms to his father.

"They'll quarrel about that boy some of these days," thought Sir Robert, "and it will be Godfrey's fault. He will be discovering he can only rule the boy through the mother, and then there will be a kick-up—and my precious sister-in-law will have her whole hand in the pie. But, I declare, if I had but a few thousands, ready money, just to go on with, I would not care how soon that pretty little thing put me out of my tantalising position, provided she conquers at last, and

rules the roast here. I must see if I cannot get Gilbert or Duncombe to make a bet with me about it. I don't see that I can learn anything more if I remain a month, so I'll e'en be off and enjoy myself."

But before he went, having accidentally encountered Miss Priscilla Flower in one of his walks, he did not disdain to prick her brains regarding the life at Asheton Court.

"I miss your beautiful sister very much; pray, where is she hiding?"

"She is not hiding at all, thank you," said the matter-of-fact Prissy, "she is in Rome, with her relations."

"I hope she is quite well."

"No, I don't think she is well; at least mamma and me don't like her letters; but there is one very good thing, and that is, Julian is quite well now."

"Oh! is he? I did not know you were interested about him."

"I am not at all interested about him, except that he went mad for May, stupid fellow."

"What! since she has been Mrs. Asheton."

"Oh, law! no; how shocking! It took place all at the same time, and Beatrice wanted her to marry Julian, and I wanted her to marry Mr. Ashton. I have almost forgotten all about it now."

"Was Mr. Asheton jealous?"

"I can't say, I am sure; he never told me if he was."

If Sir Robert had asked Prissy what she considered jealousy to be, he would have been edified by her simplicity, at all events.

"And so the Count went mad for love of her."

"Yes; was'nt it stupid of him? If he had not been in such a hurry, and so violently in love, perhaps May would have had him."

"I always thought your sister would marry

Mr. Asheton; she would have suited him much better."

"Yes, that she would; and like a pent-up torrent, Prissy's indignation burst forth. "They, I mean young Mr. Asheton and his mother, are not half good enough for May. Beatrice would have made them treat her properly. They think May is only a child, but she is very sensible, and she loves mamma and me, and would'nt care how often we came to see her."

"Are you then prevented coming to see her?"

"Yes; Mrs. Asheton says only once a week, and we are not to kiss little Rupert; but I always do, and I always will. So there now."

"I honour you very much, Priscilla; allow me to call you so, as we are connexions; and whenever you or Marion require assistance to assert your rights, call upon me, and I'll stand by you to the last breath."

"Thank you, that I will."

Oh, Prissy, Prissy, take care; you have made a compact with one who is rather like another one down below.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. TREVOR INTIMATES HER OPINION OF MRS. GODFREY ASHETON.

Lady Fane became so much stronger, that she considered herself no longer an invalid; and she spent some months at Asheton Court with great satisfaction to herself, if not to all the others. There was a doubt about this, owing to her son, whose mischievous propensities were felt more or less by every one. And there was no possibility of correcting him, without entailing upon his mother sufferings that would endanger her health.

Godfrey could now fully enter into all that

his sister Ellinor had confided to him of Cecilia's weakness and mismanagement, and, as he suffered, so did her judgment rise higher in his mind. Marion was almost the only person who had any control over the child, and she obtained it more by her power of contributing to his amusement than any other influence. While the boy did not hesitate to express his hatred of little Rupert and his sister, "because," assigned he, "if they were dead, you would have no one to take you away from me. You should tell me stories every day, and mend my whips." Marion shuddered as she heard him.

It was therefore a relief to both Godfrey and Marion when Lady Fane declared that she would go to Bath for a couple of months; the change would quite set her up for winter. And it was with equal joy that Godfrey received a letter from his sister Ellinor, saying that she would come to take her place.

She did not say, what was now the case, that want of funds retarded the completion of Trevor Castle for the winter, and the longer she could house herself and her family in comfortable quarters the better.

The whole family came; and it was with almost unaccountable delight that Godfrey showed the person whom he loved nearly the best, and whose good opinion certainly he valued the most in the world, his two beautiful children.

Mrs. Trevor was very sincere in her admiration of them. Also she was in a subdued and rather meek mood, for she had been most glaringly wrong in one or two matters concerning Trevor Castle, which, had her husband possessed the spirit of a half-drowned kitten, he would have taken instant note thereof, to his own and his daughters' manifest advantage. But he let slip the golden opportunity.

Further, she could not but be pleased and softened by her parents' delight in welcoming her back to her old home, so opportunely too, for, low be it spoken, the Trevors were in high danger of having nothing but the roofless walls of Trevor Castle to inhabit.

There was but one thing that discomposed her, namely, the increased beauty and the dignified composure of Marion. No longer blushing, timid, and girlish, she looked what she was, the future mistress of Asheton Court, the mother of Asheton babies; and magnificent children they were.

The Miss Trevors were shooting up into little sorts of spills of girls, white, meek, and mild, without a ray of animation between them. But if they were dull, still they were not mischievous; and if they did not appear as clever as Ellinor's children ought to be, it was because they bore a greater resemblance, mentally and bodily, to their father, than to

their mother. They shone with a reflected light, caused by the dazzle of Master Fane's disappearance, everybody sending pop-guns of joy after him, as he faded from sight. Thus they entered upon the Asheton arena with a popularity not their own, but which served them just as well, if not better, as it was through no fault of theirs if they lost it. And as time went on, and they discovered how unlike little Rupert was to Edward in every way, they thawed into a sort of love for the noble boy that was little short of that they felt towards each other.

Meantime, Godfrey and his sister Ellinor once more took from their shelves the long neglected books upon education. Once more they plunged themselves into all the delights of parental solicitude, with this advantage, that they could talk over the matter to their hearts' content, instead of being restricted to writing them on paper.

"Marion is wonderfully improved in looks, my dear Godfrey; she does great credit to your training, both in manners and appearance. Have you been able to supply the deficiencies of her education yet?"

"No, I fear not. Her time has been otherwise occupied; there is scarcely eighteen months between Rupert and his sister."

"I presume she is not quick naturally in learning; I picked up a great deal of my knowledge literally from love of it, for, you know, our governess was a most stupid old woman."

"Education is very different now from what it was in our time, Ellinor. If we would keep pace with all the advantages hurled by the democratic party on the rabble, we must give our children an education that formerly was bestowed on none but the most talented."

"And therefore that is only to be obtained abroad. Do you still adhere to that idea, Godfrey?"

"I do; yet I cannot see how I shall ever accomplish it. My father and mother never will consent to such a change; and to separate myself and family from them would not only be an injudicious plan, but one of positive cruelty to them."

"I see a great change in my father, Godfrey; he is so feeble, so dependent upon my mother and Marion."

"It is true. Even if my pretty Marion may not be wholly the companion I might have wished, after having had you, my Ellinor, as such, never could I have given my father and mother a daughter so suited to them, so really loved."

"I should not have alluded to my father's state, had I not seen this. We are at present not so welcome to him as the lively Marion and her fine boy. I mean, my dear brother, that my father's mind is failing him."

"You are a better judge than I am, Ellinor,

not having seen him for so long. But that is an additional reason against my leaving him."

"You will find, Godfrey, that in another year Marion's society will be enough for him. It is of consequence that so intelligent a child as Rupert should learn the modern languages in the same ratio that he does his own. We shall be going abroad ourselves about that time, while Trevor Castle is drying. I trust my dearest wish will be fulfilled, and that you and your son will be our companions."

"Can I separate Marion from her child?"

"I think it will be for his benefit. I perceive that she has in reality more influence over him than you have."

"You have noticed this."

"Most truly, the very first moment I saw you all together."

Oh, Godfrey Asheton, spurn from you so base a thought! Jealous of the mother of

your child! Fie. Think of her pretty ways, her fond upbraidings to the boy if he forgets his papa, if he does not obey papa, if he does not love him, run to him, think of him as first, best, and dearest. It's true she does all this, but where the need to teach him, and whose fault is it that he requires to be told? Not hers, oh, not hers! If fault there is, it lies with yourself.

"Your little girl will be a complete Asheton, I can foresee; you will have very little trouble with her. But Rupert has his mother's eyes. There is a little touch of indecision about them. Mrs Flower has the same."

"I beg your pardon, Ellinor, you forget there is nothing but connexionship between Marion and her aunt.'

"Ah, true; but the fact is, I have never forgotten Marion's extraordinary interference about my girls, shortly after she married. I have never lost the remembrance of Mrs.

Flower's peering and inquisitive face, from whom, I suppose, she caught the infection."

"Marion, if I remember rightly, was duly cautioned after Rupert's birth; and my mother has, finding hints of no use, restricted Mrs. Flower's visits here. She is a good-natured woman, I allow, and bears no malice. But since Beatrice Flower went to Italy, we have seen very little of them."

"I think you are wise, on account of the children. I am sorry to miss Beatrice. I looked forward to perfecting myself in Italian with her, preparatory to next year. She is indeed one whose friendship I prize, of whom I could make a sister."

"Ah, Ellinor, think not to put me out of conceit with my Marion. There is no one that ever I have seen to equal her. And if she is not accomplished, she is singularly intelligent, and the fondest little mother possible."

CHAPTER V.

MRS. GODFREY ASHETON MAKES COMMENTARIES UPON MRS. TREVOR.

To Lady Gordon, of Glenalt.

MY DEAREST SISTER,

I wanted but a letter from you to make me quite happy. That is, the letter I received stating that you are now well and comfortable. Tell me, sister, is nothing ever to occur, by which I may think of you as happy as I am myself? I require but that one thing to believe that God has showered on

me all the blessings that He has promised "to the third and fourth generation of those who loved Him." For we can look back, and tracing the deeds of those who have gone before, take this promise as our right. At least so would I think, but for your fate. Forgive me, dearest Kythe, I know this is a forbidden subject, but I must think of you sometimes, and when I am most happy, then do you rise before me—like nothing else this world can show me. My grandfather loves to hear me talk of you, and Godfrey is really anxious to know you. Say, if we travelled down so far, could we come and see you? Ah, sister, I would leave my darlings for weeks, if I might spend but one day with you. In you have I concentrated all the affections of the past, and though as year by year God gives me other loves to take the vacant places, I feel all the more strongly that nothing can obliterate the first. Nay, more sacred, more

true, more strong are all my feelings now, because the dead and the living are so mingled together.

I wish you could see my boy. The little wayward tempers of childhood are but pretty graces in him, leading the way to such sweet little frank confessions of "Me a wrong boy dis time." "Rupert not Rupert Asheton, but Rupert bad." "Me all over love for papa." "Mamma, Rupert love for pale girls, and take care of them."

These are the two little Trevor girls. I think I told you that Lady Fane left us, three weeks ago, with her son, oh! such a naughty boy. And the Trevors have come in their places for an indefinite time. Godfrey is pleased, Ellinor is his favourite sister. But to you I may say anything; you will not think, sister, that I would pass judgment upon others but for the benefit of your advice; you will tell me how far I may go, and no further. I

think that the fault of the family of the Ashetons is, that they have not mixed enough with the world. They have no standard by which to judge each other, save by each other. Mrs. Trevor has this fault more than all. She does not know, or hear, or see anything but Ashetons. She makes it a religion to worship them, to which all other religions must give way. Are you not sorry for her, sister? In an hour of grief, calamity, sudden sadness, can Ashetons comfort her as "He who holds the heavens in His hand?"

I must tell you how I discovered that she knows not yet "the love of the Saviour."

My grandfather told me always to do for him what I did for our grandfather; and when he knew that I daily read to him the Psalms and Lessons, also I was to read them to him. Mrs. Trevor said she now could tell why her father was more aged and worn than she expected—I was but a gloomy companion to

him. Dear grandfather, he placed his hand on my head, and said to her:—"I thank God every day of my life for the gift of my May Flower." This did not please her either, and I could not but think she had reason, for Godfrey has told me she was the most beloved and valued of all in the house.

Lady Fane is sweet-tempered. Dearest sister, when you pray, think of her. She is shadowy and frail—it is known that a sudden shock, a rude wind, a trifling accident, might end her life; yet does she live as if death and she were never to meet. Except that, judging of her mother's heart by my own, she clings all the more to that wayward, naughty boy because she feels she may have to leave him suddenly; and it was this that made me excuse her so, for this did I try to win the heart of the boy, for this would I have you pray for her.

But I have not told you of my little Issa,

a true Asheton—tho' but nine months old, already a little queen. I am glad I did not call her after our mother, as they kindly wished me. She would not realise her fair, elfin frame. She is already not unlike Mrs. Asheton, and will do credit to her stately name of Isobel.

I wish our children could meet. I think a little world of childish hearts and tempers is a fit beginning for the arena of the greater world. Five have you now, Kythe, and yet leave me to learn of this last one through the newspaper. Oh, sister, do I weary you with my little nursery tales, so that you will not tell me yours? or so much, that the blessing of another little loving heart is given you, and I am not to know it?

Again, forgive me, sister. In my love for my own, I dote on your children.

You wish to hear more of my nice, dear Prissy. Prissy is in love, but harmlessly so,

because it is with two people—Rupert and Sir Robert Fane. When Prissy is full of a subject, she can talk of nothing else. Rupert says, "I tiss my hand to you, Prissy," then she can think and talk only of his pretty lordly air and lovely face. Mention Sir Robert Fane, and she again is lost in summing up all he said to her, how he looked, in what he was dressed. I like Sir Robert, too. He reminds me of those I used to meet long, long ago. A courteous man of the world, I should say, ready to talk upon any subject, always a gentleman, but I feel embarrassed sometimes; his eyes are very searching. I think he knows, ere you speak, what you are about to say. I think he is not quite happy. He has a perplexed look. If I have a second son, he loses a large fortune. I hope I may not—I like not to be happy at the expense of others. Unless indeed, Godfrey, always liberal, nobly generous, would give his sister—but that will not

be the same. Indeed, I feel always a little uncomfortable when he is here.

Our Aunt Flower is well, as usual overwhelmed with parish business, and our uncle emersed in his sermons. I wonder at the difference between him and our father; all energy, all intelligence, all active kindness the one; utter inanition the other, except in the pulpit. Mr. Trevor also "irks" me, sister, as you say in Scotland. He does nothing, is nothing, but I am fain to allow it is better that he is so, than encouraging his daughters to be deceitful towards their mother. Mindful of their want of strengthening food the last time they were here, I gave our good Cummins a hint, and they scarcely visit Rupert in his nursery without some little treat, at which the dear boy is so delighted to act the hospitable host, aping his dear father in everything.

Ah, sister, how good is God to me! I

have so much to love now. Such a holy work to do, in training up my boy to be like his father, and yet one thing more that he lacks, and yet only to you would I allow that my Godfrey forgets that all are the same in the eyes of God, rich and poor, one with another, even penitent and sinner. I shall try that my boy may go to one of the great public schools, also that he may mix much with his neighbours and all around us here. Mrs. Trevor will influence Godfrey the other way, but I shall hope and trust. The citadel of prejudice is, I know, strong, but the prayers of a mother for her child are stronger. Last night, after dinner, we had an argument concerning my Aunt Flower, who had been that day to pay her usual weekly visit. And how much I love her, Kythe, for taking so pleasantly, with such good-humour, the somewhat haughty courtesy of this house. To me, she appears always as the one who will eventually be

placed in the higher seat in our Father's mansion, especially when Mrs. Trevor said—

"You should not encourage Mrs. Flower's visits here, Godfrey; it will hereafter be impossible for your children to break through the connexion."

"And why should they?" asked my kind grandfather. "I am always heartily pleased to see good, cheerful Mrs. Flower."

"She is so unrefined, so utterly deficient in all those graces and accomplishments that Godfrey and I think it necessary our children should only see."

"She is Marion's aunt," remarked Mrs. Asheton, in a low voice of reproof.

"The more reason," answered Ellinor, "that she should be kept at a distance."

"I seem to feel now as if I loved to see a little heartiness in people, especially one's neighbours, and less etiquette," said my grandfather.

"I have not now to learn that my opinions and wishes begin to be of little use, where they were before valued and demanded," said Ellinor. A painful pause followed this speech, sister. Dearest, best sister, I must gossip to you no longer.

Your fond

MAY.

CHAPTER VI.

MASTER RUPERT ASHETON TAKES GREAT LIBERTIES WITH THE MISS TREVORS, AT WHICH THEY ARE NOT SO DISPLEASED AS THEIR MOTHER.

"AND pray who is this Lady Gordon to whom I see a large closely-written letter sent every week?" asked Mrs. Trevor.

"She is Marion's sister," answered Godfrey.

"Do you ever see the letters? I suppose they require some supervision, even to her sister."

"Oh, no, my dear Ellinor," exclaimed Godfrey.

"Oh, pray say no more, it is a mistake of

mine," interrupted Mrs. Trevor, fearing she had gone too far. "Beatrice told me she had always to look over her letters, to correct the spelling."

"A complete mistake indeed. Marion writes a beautiful hand, and has a pure and almost original diction, which is much superior to the boarding-school letters of most young ladies."

"Then you see the letters?"

"No, not to her sister."

"Is that quite safe? Have you ever seen this Lady Gordon? Can she be trusted not to retail all the gossip that Marion is sure to write to her?"

"Some inexplicable cause prevents her leaving home, or giving Marion the slightest hope that she and her husband can ever accept the different invitations we have sent them. I have a letter of hers here in my desk. In everything, it proves that our loss is great in not knowing her."

"Beautiful handwriting, very nicely expressed," commented Mrs. Trevor, as she read the letter. "Excellently well insinuated, that remark about Marion's happiness being so dependent on those she loved. It shows that she is aware, as well as ourselves, of her want of character. Kythe Gordon, Kythe—very odd name, singular, and extremely uncommon. Why did you not call your daughter Kythe, Godfrey? I think it a well-sounding name."

"It was given to Lady Gordon under singular circumstances by her godmother, and a condition was attached to the giving of it, which was to prevent any of her own family ever using it. It is remarkable that Lady Gordon has married into the very family that owns the name, and has restored to it the bequest of her godmother, which she could only hold as a Kythe Gordon. Thus she was called Kythe Gordon Flower—now she is Kythe

Gordon Gordon, and her godmother's money has returned to the proper family."

"That seems singular. Why should it have been left away?"

"One might almost imagine there is some secret curse belonging to that family, as it was dying out for want of heirs; the last one, the present Sir Alan, having, it is said, been enjoined by his father never to marry. Thus they were seeking for old and dear friends on whom to bestow the wealth that would eventually fall to the crown. The beauty of Miss Flower proved too strong for Sir Alan to keep the promise made to his father, but I fear he suffers for breaking it. They are, though strongly attached, not happy."

"Very strange indeed. I should go down to Scotland, if I was you, Godfrey, and visit them some day."

"We have offered to do so, but a convenient time has not yet occurred. The sisters are

greatly attached to each other, though they have only been together for eight months in their whole lives."

"I have had a very pleasant letter to-day from Sark, our architect. He felt sure that the mining agent was withholding our just dues from the mine. Therefore he has employed the last month in going over all the works, his services at the Castle being needless at present, and he has discovered a new seam, which he confidently expects will double our income. In another month he will be able to speak for a certainty, as at present there is a good deal of water to be pumped out. I must consequently make the most of your society, my dear brother. I may have it but for one short month more."

"Indeed! Then I will at once proceed to write out our plan of education. Even if I cannot carry it out, it will be of use to refer to."

But Mrs. Trevor, though her visit began in a sort of calm, did not intend it should end so. She had put some little restraint upon herself, because, not knowing for how many months she might require the use of Asheton Court, she acknowledged to herself it would be injudicious to quarrel with her present desirable quarters. She knew, if dissensions arose, that it would be she who would have to leave, and not Marion, consequently, self-interest keeping her quiet (though she felt boiling over with indignation once or twice), the moment the necessity for restraint was over, she indemnified herself. It is especially easy to find fault when there is the determination to do so, with or without provocation.

Cummins, the nurse, was an object of great displeasure to Mrs. Trevor.

Not only had she been heard pitying the little half-starved Miss Trevors, but she was indifferent to all Mrs. Trevor's remarks upon

her faulty management and ill-conducted nursery arrangements. Certainly, great regularity in their meals was exercised, but Rupert never asked for milk, cake, or fruit, that some was not given him, in the intermediate time. To be sure, it was not much; even little Issa was allowed milk if she chose.

Strongly did Mrs. Trevor reprobate this plan, but Cummins had only to show her healthy children in answer. Mrs. Trevor had the disagreeable feelings of knowing that Cummins listened to her most respectfully, but nothing more, and that with every disposition to find fault, there was nothing tangible to mention to Godfrey. Yet what a hold she would have over Marion, what ample revenge she could give herself for Marion's early interference with her daughters, if she could but obtain the dismissal of Cummins, and put a nurse of her own choosing in her place. It must be done somehow.

But time was going on; Cummins was more respectful than ever, and yet had her own way under Mrs. Trevor's very nose. One day, attracted by an unusual commotion in the nursery, which was over her mother's sitting room, Mrs. Trevor ran up stairs.

There did she behold, seated upon an improvised war-chariot, composed of his own particular chair reversed, with a gay-coloured shawl as hammercloth, Master Asheton. In one hand, a new whip, given him but the day before by his grandfather, which he was cracking with most evident delight, while, in the other, he held long reins of pink tape, attached to the mouths of two prancing war-horses, who were kicking and capering on all fours at each vehement command, as well as whip cracks, of the delighted boy. Alas, for those prancing steeds! Who before had ever seen the Miss Trevors in such a degraded, unlady-like position?

Save the young Jehu, all looked aghast.

"Are those the Miss Trevors?" said their affectionate mother, in a slow cutting voice they knew but two well.

"Master Asheton is such a rumbustical fellow," said Cummins, wishing to excuse the alarmed girls, "he'll drive his own legs, if he can get nothing else."

"Go to your rooms," said Mrs. Trevor to her daughters. "As for you" (turning to the nurse), "make preparations to leave the house. My brother will never suffer a person who could see young ladies demean themselves in such a manner, before her own eyes, to remain as superintendent of his children."

"Nay, ma'am," urged Cummins, "children will be children; you was young once yourself."

"Good heavens! do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Surely, ma'am. Here, Master Asheton,

come here, sir, and make your bow to your aunt, and say you are sorry you have displeased her."

Mrs. Trevor turned and left the room, without deigning to look at nurse or boy, and went straight with her tale to Godfrey, where, thinking that Ashetons were at liberty to say what they liked, whether true or not, she gave such a colouring to her story, that it seemed to take him but two lordly strides to enter the nursery.

There and then, the good Cummins received her *congé*, with a long exordium, to boot, upon the exceeding impropriety of her conduct. She listened in respectful silence, until her master was fairly reduced to a nonplus for words, and then said quietly—

"Pray, sir, allow me to call upon those who were present, to say if either my words or manner were such as you describe."

"You forget yourself, Mrs. Cummins," said

Godfrey, haughtily. "I require no witnesses when Mrs. Trevor has spoken."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the nurse; "my character is more valuable to me than Mrs. Trevor's can be to her, for I have to gain my bread by it. You have been a kind and just master to me, and you cannot refuse me an opportunity of righting myself."

"I can have no objection to you making any apology you choose, and I have no doubt Mrs. Trevor will accept of it."

"Sir, not having been either disrespectful or impertinent to Mrs. Trevor, I have no apology to make, I merely want justice."

At this moment Marion hastily entered the room. "Godfrey, this is not true, surely Cummins is not to go?"

"Hush, Marion. This is not the place in which to discuss this subject."

"But our children," murmured Marion; "Cumings is so good a nurse, we shall never

get such another, they are so attached to her."

"Cease, pray," said Godfrey sternly, "you entirely forget your position."

"I think only of the children; who will take the care of them that Cummins does?" said Marion, beseechingly.

"I have already said, that if Mrs. Trevor is willing to receive an apology, I shall look over the offence for this time."

"But, nurse, it is a mistake," said Marion, anxiously; "surely you were neither impertinent nor uncivil?"

"No, indeed, ma'am; neither the one or the other; so, not even to oblige you, can I apologize."

Godfrey left the room, the dark flush of anger spreading over his face, while Marion's tears rose to her eyes. She knew full well Mrs. Trevor would not even have accepted an apology, had nurse been inclined to give one.

"Come, dear ma'am, don't take on; there

are many nurses besides me, and very few that would not do their duty by you and the sweet children. Come, come, dear young lady, may you never have a worse sorrow than to part with a faithful servant."

Marion's heart sunk within her.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. TREVOR AND HER NEPHEW RUPERT HAVE THEIR FIRST QUARREL.

But Godfrey and Mrs. Trevor were not to lord it thus, without very vehement marks of disapprobation from some of the inhabitants of the Court.

The oldest and the youngest Asheton in the house raised up their voices in open rebellion; for Marion's fears had not belied her. Nurse might have strung apologies as thick as blackberries on a hedge, to offer the offended lady, yet fail to regain a remittance of her sentence;

especially when Mrs. Trevor discovered that her father was as vehement in his dipleasure as Master Rupert was uproarious in his, at the dismissal of their joint favourite.

Never before had Mr. Asheton been heard to express disapprobation of his daughter Ellinor; but now, had nurse really insulted her, had she even raised her hand against a daughter of the house, the fond old grandfather would have considered any course better than that the beautiful healthy children should lose their nurse, who took such pride in them.

Mrs. Trevor's heart swelled higher and higher as she heard her father's open remarks.

"It was all nonsense, he did not believe that nurse could be uncivil if she tried; and if she had been so, Godfrey ought to look over it, rather than allow little Rupert to roar and cry in that dangerous manner."

She must triumph, or farewell to any influence for the future; so taking advantage of her father's daily drive with Marion, she urged Godfrey to dismiss Cummins at once, to avoid further words.

But Rupert was rather too intelligent for her.

"How dare you be so naughty," she said to the baby boy, as—hearing the order for nurse's departure—he began struggling into his coat, the wrong side before, his hat nearly in the same predicament, with the string flopping over his nose, adding to his irritation.

"Go away, go away, ugly woman!" said Rupert; "me go with nursey—go, go, oh, you ugly, ugly." His face of disgust, and his pointed finger, were more expressive than his words.

Mrs. Trevor called his father, giving him, as they ascended to the nursery together, her ideas of the language his son had used, and

the source from which it had undoubtedly sprung.

"Rupert, how is this?" said his father, as if the boy was eight or ten years old. For neither he nor his sister, to do them justice, knew exactly how to treat anything smaller.

"Go, go, ugly aunt!" answered Rupert, as he saw Mrs. Trevor.

"For shame, sir," said his father, sternly; "who taught you such language?"

Rupert was silent. The passionate love of his father for him had never shown itself in this form before. But, with the trusting nature of childhood, he threw himself into his father's arms, and said—

"Aunt did; she make Rupert angry."

Godfrey was posed for a moment.

"But you must not say such words to your aunt—it is very naughty."

"Why she send my nurse away?—not her nursey?"

And the air with which he said it, so haughty and indignant, was so truly Ashetonian, his father clasped him closer to his heart.

"But you are an Asheton, and are to be a gentleman; you must tell your aunt you are sorry."

"Me won't."

"Rupert, I am ashamed of you."

"Rupert 'shamed of aunt," said the young delinquent, sulkily.

"You must say you are sorry."

Perhaps, if Godfrey had known more of children, he would not have entered so hastily into this quarrel with his son. What parent has not experienced the pain of the first struggle for power? The younger the little obstinate mind is, the more it holds with the tenacity of instinct to the determination to have its own way. Reason has not yet had time to dawn upon the intellect, and

while the parent wearies and mourns over what, being so plain to him, seems but additional perverseness on the part of the child, a turning from the subject, a new object, any slight cause would divert the little mind, and end the matter happily.

But with some parents such a course would be deemed an infringement of their duty. The first sign of the "original man" showing itself in their child must be crushed, no matter how painful (and, generally much more painful to the parent) the operation; if it causes weeks of estrangement, fits of passion and sulks, nay, if it ends even in illness, the parent must conquer, the child must be conquered. God forbid that any word in these pages should tend to encourage the spoiling of children! Already, in this age, it may be remarked (*en passant*), ruling a great deal more than they ought, and brought forward on occasions when they should be

asleep, as well as kept in their proper place—the nursery. How otherwise is the self-sufficiency of the present rising generation to be accounted for, but that from the cradle they began to experience the delightful fact, their weal or woe causes shade or sunshine to pervade their dwelling. When fully developed, experienced heads cannot withstand the flattering idea that they are necessary to somebody's happiness, how can little weak heads hope to escape?

But to return. Woe betide that conscientious good parent who thinks it necessary, for his child's welfare, to do battle with the evil spirit within him too early. Rather let him temporise the matter until, with reason on his side, and the perception of his parent's real love as well, the little obstinate being yields with a good grace. It is only when too young to have any perception but that he must have his own way, that these painful scenes between parent and baby take place.

It is better to ward them off.

It is better to soften than rouse the evil that dwells within us.

Doth God deal hardly by us? No; by the bonds of pitiful mercy, by the paths of gentle persuasion, He leads us on, until, through grace, we find ourselves in the open ground of reason and judgment, and, unbiassed, are free to choose either of the paths now before us.

The end of all this dissertation is, that master Rupert was obstinate, and his father on the horns of a dilemma.

Beating was out of the question, for two reasons; he was a baby and an Asheton. The first caused by his being two little, the second, from being too great. Into such anomalies do people fling themselves when they elevate their pigmy frames above other pigmies. Rupert exemplified, through his father's inability to determine his precise station in life,

the somewhat extraordinary mixture of a Lilliputian in one respect, and an inhabitant of Brobdignag (both metaphorically) in another. Mrs. Trevor certainly would have liked to have had the whipping of him (we use the words that, as a privileged author, we know she thought, but did not speak); but she was not yet so far gone in "Passion's maddening path" as to dare to hint thereat.

After an hour's fruitless warfare, she recommended him to be confined to one corner of the room, barricaded therein by a table; and though the barricade proved of little avail, for on the instant he emerged from beneath, yet she was fain to leave him only guarded by his own honour, which had led him to march into another corner, of his entire free will; from out of which he sulkily frowned on her, but gave great sobs as he looked at his father.

Godfrey could not endure the trial further,

and hearing the carriage driving up, he went downstairs to tell his tale, followed by Mrs. Trevor. Most indignant was she as her father loudly and angrily upbraided both. "Dear grandfather," whispered Marion, "he must do as he is bid. I may go to him, Godfrey?"

Though Mrs. Trevor said no, Godfrey was too glad to let her go. Shocked was she to see his lovely face all swollen and angry, his hair all disordered.

Smoothing his beautiful curls, and speaking little soft motherly words, she took him up in her arms. Mrs. Trevor and Godfrey followed her.

The child did not see them, but feeling in his mother's clasp, and looking up into her loving eyes, his little overburdened heart began to sob out its relief.

"Mamma, mamma, love Rupert."

"Mamma loves you, my darling."

"Nursey gone, mamma?"

"I know, dear; but papa is here, and mamma, and baby sister."

"Why nursey leave me?"

"Perhaps another little boy wanted her."

"Rupert is sleepy, very."

"Then sleep, dear; but first say your prayers."

He lisped out the simple prayer, and when he came to the last words, "Make Rupert a good boy," he stole a look at his mother's face.

"Rupert must do as his papa bids him, before he is a good boy."

"Rupert won't."

"Then he must go to sleep without God's blessing, or papa's kiss."

"Me love papa."

"No, Rupert loves himself best."

Marion raised him, so that he saw both his father and aunt.

"Papa, papa," said the child, holding out his arms.

"Don't take him," said Mrs. Trevor, "on any account, until he has apologized."

But the young mother had laid her child in its father's arms, and the little rosy mouth was placed upon his so confidently, that Godfrey returned the kiss right lovingly.

"Rupert loves papa," said Marion.

"Yes, yes," said the eager child.

"Then he will do what papa wishes," said the gentle pleading mother.

Rupert looked at his aunt dubiously, then at his father's face, where the radiant smile that had stolen Marion's heart was beaming.

"I sorry," said he, with a little lordly air, waving his hand in an inimitable manner towards his aunt, then with a burst of delight, as if his little heart was relieved from a weight, he threw his arms round his father's neck, and laughed with pleasure.

"A remarkable change, indeed," said Mrs. Trevor; "just now we were all sulks and sullens, and now we are noisy and gay."

"He knows no better, he is so young, Ellinor," said Marion.

"He is quite old enough to know that e has been very naughty, and such mirth is very unseemly; and if I were you, Godfrey, I would still have him well punished."

"No, no," said the fond father, only too happy to escape any more battles with his idolized darling. "He is sleepy now, and must go to bed. Is it not so, my boy?"

"Yes. God bless Rupert, and make him a good boy."

No wonder that Marion, in her heart of hearts, thought that never mother had such a child; while Godfrey, if he could not quite enter into the beauty of the child's character,

thus breaking forth in the incidents of the day, yet congratulated himself upon his extraordinary intellect and understanding, which were indeed great.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. TREVOR GETS HER OWN WAY, AND AS IT SOMETIMES HAPPENS, IS MUCH DISGUSTED THEREAT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the assurance from Marion that her boy was now happy, kissed, forgiven, and sent to sleep off his unwonted troubles, Mr. Asheton was anything but appeased.

"I have sent for Cummins back again," said he. "I have sent my own carriage; I am master of this house; I will allow of no interference, Ellinor; little Rupert shall have all his own way as long as I live."

This he had the satisfaction of repeating

over and over again, no one contradicting him, for Godfrey was too sorry to see how much he had discomposed his father, and Mrs. Trevor could not have borne it at all, had she not calmed herself with the idea that her father's mind was greatly impaired.

By the time dinner was over, a judicious forgetfulness has fallen on the whole party; and on the appearance of Rupert at dessert, more beautiful and intelligent than ever, for his long sleep had coloured his cheeks, brightened his eyes, and rendered him unusually lively, his grandfather was prepared to forgive and forget everything, which is not a singular feeling when one has had one's own way. A decided redness about the eyes and noses of the Miss Trevors, might have suggested to a spectator, unaware of the habits of the family, that something disagreeable had occurred, but nothing more.

And even suppose they had suffered, did

not little Rupert insist that they should taste his wine, eat his cake, have each an orange (grandfather was bent upon his having all his own way), and did not the little girls whisper to each other, at night, the only time they could interchange sentiments, what a little darling he was, to try and make up to them, for all they had suffered, so unlike Edward, so like dear Aunt May?

And was ever anything like grandpapa, the next day giving them each a golden guinea in the most clandestine manner, when no one was near, because they made such good prancing steeds in dear little Rupert's war-chariot. Poor Marion, if she had heard of Mr. Asheton's bribery and corruption, would have been obliged to class him in the same category as Mr. Trevor, a promoter of deceit, a deviser of lies. Fortunately for all parties, the mooted question of Mrs. Cummins was arranged by an extraneous party. That worthy nurse confided

to her mistress, that it was better on all accounts that she should leave, which Marion was loath to allow, even though she felt the justice of Cummins's remark.

"But, dear ma'am, if no one has any objection, I need not go far, for Mr. Clifton, the head gardener, has been urging me very often, only I could not bear to leave the children; but it is very handy to be so near. Night and day I should be always ready. Mrs. Trevor will never forgive you, ma'am, if I stay; master will alway look unkindly; I respect and honour master, love you, ma'am, dote on the dear children, couldn't never go out to service again, after nursing Master and Miss Asheton. Hope, dear ma'am, would think it was best. She married Mr. Clifton."

Marion and Godfrey were both gratified by this arrangement. Mr. Asheton was suspicious as to some bribery having been used—Mrs. Asheton was pleased and not pleased.

Pleased that so excellent a nurse should remain at hand, displeased that so disrespectful a servant should be thus rewarded; she took her daughter's side.

Mrs. Trevor, of course, was disgusted.

Master Rupert shared in this feeling with his aunt, strange to say, but from a different motive. Nothing but the fear of another "corner day" prevented him from calling the amiable, love-sick, bass-scented Clifton his only vituperative word, "ugly, ugly."

However, promises of constant teas, and feasts of strawberries and cream in the garden-house, went a great way towards reconciling him, while the sacred contract that was made, undertaking that Clifton was never to be invited to them, helped still further.

Meantime, he derived a great deal of amusement in the preparations for the wedding; and as his grandpapa set no bounds to his presents,

in the plenishing and setting forth the garden-house, and Master Rupert was his medium for bestowing them, the eventual departure of his nurse was completely lost sight of in the delight of helping her to go. Though, to outward appearances, all was forgotton on Mrs. Trevor's part, sadly could that mute Diana, still so apparently bent upon hunting, have given testimony to the contrary, were speech among her gifts. And still more sad was it to see a man, a father, a husband lending his ear to insidious whispers, that had no better emanation than the weak querulous follies of a jealous woman.

How often is it the case that a contracted circle of friends, a limited routine of duty, narrows the heart and confines the power of judgment, until habit becomes the rule of one's actions, and not the higher principle of religion and good-fellowship. So long the slave of family prejudices and whims, Godfrey

Asheton may be pardoned if he was over persuaded and fooled by the plausible tongue of one he thought of more favourably than any other person in the world, and who also was decidedly wronged.

Old Mr. Asheton did not mend the matter, for his favourite May Flower and his idolized grandson, by the determination he evinced to hear nothing but what was most excellent, most charming, of both.

"You must suffer me, my dear Godfrey, to lead the way to various opinions on the subject of education, by which you will perceive Marion totally differs from you; and seeing the extraordinary influence she already possesses over your son, I should be ill doing my duty to you, the most valued of all my earthly affections, if I did not warn you," said Mrs. Trevor.

Thus, evening after evening, was the unwary Marion beguiled into detailing all her hopes

and wishes for the future education of her boy; and if in some instances Mrs. Trevor showed the cloven foot, and was somewhat uncourteous in her remarks, Godfrey was silent, the fond grandfather delighted.

But once only did Godfrey remonstrate—it was upon Marion's verdict of a public school.

"Impossible," he exclaimed; "remember the vast variety of characters and persons to be met with in a public school. He might know those with whom you least wished him to associate. No parent is justified in thrusting a young and inexperienced child into a heterogeneous medley of indifferent characters."

"Why are we born, then, as some of the sands on an illimitable shore, atoms amongst myriads, but that we may find our level and place among them. If God had designed that we were not each to help the other, why make

the world so populous, and his second command so voluminous in its directions?"

"Man, the grown-up, finished man," observed Mrs. Trevor, "ought alone to be trusted in the world. He can then judge whom to choose as friends, and whom to reject."

"But where can he gain his experience, save in the world, of which a public school is the type? From their cradle we can inculcate Religion, Truth, and Honour, and send them forth to fight with these, in the battle-field of their duty—the world."

"Absurd, absurd—all words and no sense—specious theory," murmured Mrs. Trevor; "just as wanting in common sense as the arguments you used last night about your Aunt Flower."

Mr. Asheton. "I approved of all that May Flower said regarding her Aunt Flower. She may be, as you say, Ellinor, unrefined,

fussy, inquisitive, but she is the most unselfish person I know—never was a kinder heart. I have learnt several lessons from her; and if in the near approach of the mighty leveller of us all, Death, I have been led to think more than I ever did before, it occurs to me, who among us proud Ashetons can say that we have mixed as freely and pleasantly among our neighbours, doing them what good we were enabled? Have we not rather thought that, though they might turn to dust and ashes, it would not be so with us? And yet all the difference between us is, that we have held aloof from those created by God in the same mould, gifted with the same gifts — without any other reason for so doing than our own conceits. I misdoubt me but I have harshly judged some of my neighbours for faults that will show lightly against my own sins of pride and omission. Bring up your boy differently, Godfrey. Let him freely mix with all men.

His nature is such that he will cull the good and despise the bad."

Mrs. Trevor. "We shall hear then of the Ashetons becoming democrats and every other despicable thing."

Mr. Asheton. "Nay, I would not have all persons turned summarily into the world, to pick and choose; but with the clear head and good judgment that our darling will have, the study of his fellow-creatures will educate him."

Godfrey. "I must say, my dear father, your language is so unlike what you formerly used, that I am at a loss to know from whence arises the change."

Mrs. Trevor. "Then I am not. And presuming that my father does not regard me as wholly witless, I desire he will look at my system of education. In following that out, I never have deviated from one rule. My girls have associated with no human being

beyond those with whom they were necessitated to hold intercourse. You will see the result. Forming their opinions from my matured judgment, aided by their father, they will eventually be part of ourselves. We shall have in them companions similar in ideas and opinions, and shall thus be independent of society. Then, no more with every delicate and sensitive feeling outraged by the habits and manners of people, I grieve to say, in the very best society, we shall live calmly; happy in the refined natures about us, with nothing to annoy us, nothing to disgust us, either *outré* or uncongenial. Surely, my dear Godfrey, you enter into my feelings. You must understand me."

Godfrey. "I do, Ellinor, and agree with you also. Such a life as you anticipate with your children, so do I with mine."

Mr. Asheton. "And you, pretty one?"

Marion. "I hope our children will do

good in their generation, whether it be to the many or to the few."

Mrs. Trevor. "Surely you do not mean to argue that your children were born for any other purpose than to benefit their parents, and be their pride and happiness."

Marion. "When their parents gave them life, God gave them souls. They must render them back to Him with the account of their stewardship."

Mrs. Trevor. "I would rather have no children at all, than hold them as such public property. But, my dear child, why I argue with you, I cannot tell. Luckily, my brother, with his admirable sense and judgment, is at hand. As long as he is allowed a proper share in the affections of his children, I have little doubt of the result. Like myself, he will reap the reward of his care and attention, and he will need a double portion of both to counteract the effects of their mother's want

of wisdom, and their Aunt Flower's lack of refinement."

"My dear Mrs. Asheton," said Mr. Asheton, as he folded himself up warm in bed, "when does Ellinor leave us?"

"Next Monday," said his spouse.

"My dear, do you know I think Ellinor is much altered, altered for the worse?"

"I think she is, Mr. Asheton; probably she had a trying time of it with Lady Fane."

"She seems to me to have grown interfering; and her manner with my little pet May is annoying to me."

"I am afraid she is a little jealous."

"Poor soul! Well, perhaps she is; we were all so fond of her, and now we think of Marion. But still, she should not have interfered with my little supper. I feel much in want of it.

"She was afraid it would make you bilious."

"But I am not bilious; and besides, I have felt much better and stronger since Marion advised me to take it."

"I presume she had heard it was Marion's advice, because when I wanted to ground my new stool in blue, because May advised it, she has made me get brown wool instead, and really the piece I have done looks very ugly. The brown and the yellow dont agree."

"Dear, dear, that is sad; don't do any more of it, but wait until Monday, then pick out the brown, and do it in blue, as May advises."

"I think I will take your advice, Mr. Asheton. And I shall also be glad when those two little girls leave. I cannot be quite certain that they are all Ellinor wishes, and that distresses me."

"Poor little dears, they grow very much, but are sadly thin; I wish they were a little more lively. But young Rupert spoils us for

all children, and his sister promises to be just such another, though she has black eyes and hair. Well, good night, my dear Mrs. Asheton, on Monday we shall again be comfortable."

At that very moment Mrs. Trevor was confiding to "dear Trevor" similar sentiments.

"I am delighted Monday is so near; it is bitterly painful to me to perceive my place usurped by a young person, who is only clever in artfulness. This is the second time that she has driven me from my father's house. But let her beware; if I again place myself in such a position, she shall be the sufferer, I the conqueror."

"Of course, dear Ellinor."

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH SIR ROBERT FANE, THOUGH HE HAS SAVED NOTHING, IS YET BUOYANT IN SPIRITS.

Scene—A DUCAL PALACE.

Present:—Three gentlemen; *a billiard-table, books, newspapers, pipes, and cigars.*

"DID you ever see any one so down in the mouth as Fane?" says a gentleman with a cigar in his mouth.

"Never," answered another, who was smoking a pipe.

"He made a shocking bad book last Derby," remarked a third, with an unoccupied mouth.

"They tell me he is deuced hard up," began the cigar.

"I wonder if he will have to sell," interrupted the pipe; "I'll have a bid for his brown horse 'Accomodation,' if he touches five hundred. There's not a cleverer horse in the kingdom."

"They tell me he has a wonderful shooting pony, for which he refused sixty guineas, and it is scarcely as high as twelve hands."

"He always was a capital judge of a horse, poor devil, and I shall miss his advice very much."

"I should hardly give him credit for that, seeing he is so unlucky on the turf."

"Don't you see that's the very reason of it? He picks out the best horse, stakes all, and we know (by pretty fair experience, I fancy) it is rarely the best horse that wins."

"It may be as you say. However, as there appears no time to be lost, I shall just put out

a feeler about 'Accommodation.' Where has he moped off to, I wonder, since, Tiffin?"

"I saw him in the library, spelling the papers."

"Ha! bad sign; when a man loses his spirits, he always plunges into politics, in the sure hope of finding some one in a worse plight than himself. If he was not too out of condition to whistle, I should conjecture the coming hero was our disconsolate knight."

Enter Sir Robert Fane, whistling, and looking remarkably pleasant.

"Hillo, Fane! Who has left you a thumping legacy, that you have recovered your spirits so wonderfully?"

"A Miss Asheton. I saw it in the paper."

"Is it much?"

"About four thousand a year. I'll bet you two to one you don't hote the red ball, as often as I do, in half-an-hour."

Scene changes.

Once again Sir Robert had a reprieve; and time rolled on, leaving him more hopeful than ever, more bankrupt in good intentions. Nearly five years had elapsed since Mr. Godfrey Asheton's marriage, and he was still in possession of the Rollinston estates, and safe at all events for another year.

He would make a regular good business of it this year; it should and would be a lucky one to him. It was no fault of his that he could not save. Lady Fane's expenses even doubled his; and if, in her invalid state, she required such constant change of air, and so many useless luxuries, why, her own family must provide them.

Enjoy himself thoroughly he would; for it was out of all reason to suppose that Mrs. Godfrey Asheton would confine herself wholly to perpetuating the female race of Ashetons. He was sick of making bets about it. This year should be his last and merriest. And as

for the ensuing ones, they must shift for themselves.

The result of this magnanimous resolution was, that, at the end of this jovial year, there remained to Sir Robert but a modicum of his own patrimony, and a ruinous mortgage on the Rollinston estates; as the percentage was enormous for money lent on such a precarious tenure. "Accommodation" was accommodated with a stall in the stable of Mr. Pipe, and the shooting pony became the property of the cigar. With the sale of some other horses, he found himself possessed of 1400 and some odd pounds for the current expenses of the next year; Rollinston Court alone taking about three thousand a year to keep it up in the style patronized by Lady Fane.

Something must be done. He would rush down to Asheton Court, discover if there was any likelihood of its being disposed, and if such was the case, throw himself upon his brother-

in-law's generosity, promise to become a good boy, and all other fine things; for which he took great credit to himself, without reflecting that he intended to become a reformed character rather because he was forced to do so by circumstances than conviction.

No particular change had taken place at Asheton Court, but there were indubitable signs that great ones were impending.

Mr. Asheton himself, on whom Time was laying his hands with visible marks, even month by month, was cheerfully preparing himself, and those around him, for the hour when "they should look for him and see him no more."

The true beauty of a Christian character had only dawned upon him in latest life, but the avidity with which he imbibed its principles spoke the peace and joy it gave him.

One fear only troubled him.

"All the days of the life of my pilgrimage

have been so happy, so blest, I know not if my God hath seen aught fit in me to chasten. Has He left me alone in my pride of manhood and lust of self-conceit? How answer you this, May Flower?"

"The wise Preacher saith, 'Prosperity is more dangerous to the soul than adversity.' 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter heaven.' 'He that, being exalted, hath humbled himself, shall be pardoned.'"

"Ha, that will do; that latter text suits me. In that hope will I die."

Mrs. Asheton also began to be feeble and somewhat broken.

But none were so changed as Marion.

Pale, spiritless, shadowy, the bloom of her beautiful womanhood was gone, leaving the touching air of an ever-beseeching pity in her countenance.

An air unheeded, entreating looks unnoticed,

the stern Godfrey Asheton pursued his way as if granite composed his thoughts, and iron was their medium of expression.

Standing almost alone in his opinions, now that his sister Ellinor was, as she informed him, driven from the house, he considered it all the more incumbent upon him to be undeviatory.

His father's weakened mind, his mother's broken health, Marion's obstinacy, all concurred together to leave to him the task of preserving the faith and creed of the Ashetons untarnished and unbroken.

"Poor little thing," thought Sir Robert, "what a change!" Once again, as he had seen her before, was she holding up a child for its grandfather to kiss.

"Little darling," said the fond old man, "I love her dearly. Nurse showed me her pretty little head this morning, all covered with fair rings of hair that will be long ones

like your own, my May, when I am laid in my last home."

"But she has dark eyes, very dark eyes, grandfather."

"True, May Flower; once more Godfrey and Marion are united; it is for this I love the child. May it ever be so."

Again Sir Robert thought.

"Ever be so! What can Godfrey be about that he does not see the change in his wife? I'll bet—no, I am to bet no more. But its odds now who goes first. Grief kills sooner than old age, and her heart is such a sensitive one. He loves her still, after his fashion, but his stern coldness is slaying her. Well, if 'tis his pleasure, who may gainsay him? Not I. She is very fit to make an angel. I am not sure if it would not be kind to wish her one at once. I'll step over to Woodhead, and hear what my little *confidante* thinks."

Miss Flower was there also. "Grown

most remarkably plain," thought Sir Robert, "which is often the case with your dark beauties, when they allow a few little tempers to sour them. Fair women may be, and look, cross, but a dark one should ever keep sunshine about her, to brighten up the shadows that nature has already planted in her face."

Prissy appeared fat, dull, and somewhat morose. Miss Flower was, what she looked, undeniably cross.

"I find your cousin Marion very much changed," said Sir Robert, after some other conversation.

A gleam of pleasure made Miss Flower handsome again.

"You need'nt have taken the trouble to come and tell me that," said Prissy, sharply.

"I beg your pardon," said Sir Robert, courteously hoping Prissy's temper would overflow in words a little more, but he was disappointed. Mrs. Flower suddenly entered,

"An excellent text, my dear girls; most appropriate; I knew we should find one—'Be ye compassionate one towards another.'"

Sir Robert left Asheton Court in very buoyant spirits, upon the whole.

CHAPTER X.

BEGINS IN SORROW, AND ENDS IN DEATH.

MARION guarded the life of her kind father-in-law as if her own hung upon the fragile thread. Nay, more than life to her was bound up in his presence. That one plague-spot, burnt in by the infectious touch of Mrs. Trevor's jealous finger, was spreading. Marion could see it in each look, each word, each gesture of her husband's. But even when most inclined to deprecate his poor judgment of her loving ways, her gentle lessons to her little children,

her mother words, all tending to exalt and honour him as first and dearest in their baby eyes, yet he was Godfrey—her Godfrey—and she murmured not. She bore silently, but not the less bravely, her secret weight of apprehension.

"May Flower, my dear wife has written, at my request, to my children. I would fain see all my children ere I die."

"Oh, grandfather," was all that May could utter.

"Poor child, poor Marion. I wish it may all be well with you when I am gone. You will have to suffer. But remember, May Flower, you are to guard my babies. Do not let my little darlings have to mourn that their mother loved their father more than his children. You must be their safe-guard."

"And if I lose my husband's love?" murmured Marion.

"May Flower, you taught me where to look

for comfort, young as you are, and old as I am. Trust in the Lord, my child, I have a good hope within me, all will be well."

As the world will not stand still, and the inhabitants within it progress in evil or good, according to their different propensities, so did the same party, assembled once more, as at Godfrey Asheton's marriage, show the marks of their earthly inheritance.

Mr. and Mrs. Trevor were exaggerated types of their former selves, neither so peculiarly amiable as to lead their friends to felicitate themselves on their progression towards Trevor perfection. Godfrey, we have seen, was more profoundly wrapt up in Asheton prejudices, than when, on the first opening of this history, he stigmatized the whole world, and wished himself out of it. Not that he did so now. No, amid all that morbidness, that disgust, that hatred of mankind, he bore the tenderest heart in the world for a few privi-

ledged human beings. He doted upon his boy, he was never tired of admiring his little stately Issa, but, in his innermost heart of all, the little baby Mabel had crept, until her image filled it. Never was there seen so coaxing, so imperious, so loving, so exacting a little mortal. Though but two years old, her lisping words were laws, her tiny will a command. Fearless and confiding, if he frowned, she kissed; if he spoke sternly, she laughed. Unlike their other two children, who deferred to the mother as much as to the father, baby Mabel took possession of that stately father as her own property, and he was content to unbend and be her playfellow, for there was no gainsaying her.

Meantime, it was yet too plain that his mother's words alone coaxed Rupert to be good — that only to her mother would the little turbulent Issa unbend.

Lady Fane, pale and shadowing, with the

breath of life struggling within her, lived as if every warm and sunny day would enact a miracle for her, and restore her to sudden strength. In nothing had she prepared for any change, in nothing did she expect to find it. Not even in her ten years old boy, who, still with baby habits, only showed his increase of wisdom by being rather more clever in planning acts of mischief, in which his cousins, the unfortunate Miss Trevors, were his greatest victims.

They appeared, amid the whole party, to be alone stationary.

Trevor Castle was not only still unfinished, but Mr. Sark's golden dreams of a new seam in the mine were only partially realised. That is, his hopes had not been vague, but they had only produced copper at present. This metal did not suffice to continue the building of Trevor Castle according to the magnificent notions with which it was begun. Indeed, it

appeared probable that, if finished at all, the Trevors would only have sufficient income left to live in one room. So Mrs. Trevor accepted with much pleasure her mother's invitation to Asheton. It having become a paramount necessity that they should go abroad—really to retrench, ostensibly for the Miss Trevors' education—every possible influence she possessed with her brother should be used to induce him to accompany them. As head of Mr. Asheton's establishment, she would be in her proper place. Without it, she was only one among many luckless individuals hiding their straitened circumstances in foreign lands.

So she came armed at all points, and the pale, little, resolute mother stood up with nothing but her strong mother heart to do battle with her.

"So Rupert can read," said Lady Fane, one day, in her soft invalid whisper. "Do you hear that, my darling?"

"I don't care," murmured a voice, smothered in her dress; "but he has three whips, and they all crack."

"I dare say," answered his mother; "he learnt in his books how to crack them."

"Did he?" said the young dunce, emerging suddenly and eagerly. "Aunt May, teach me to read."

"No; come here, my dear Edward, your Aunt Marion is no governess. Come to my room, and I will give you a lesson."

Mrs. Trevor proffered in vain. The "little wretch," as she termed him, shrunk closer into his usual shelter.

Rupert was an object of great envy to Edward; he watched his manly attempts to ride with wonder, and heard him crack his whips (which his vigorous young arm did as loud as any man), with an intense longing to do the like.

Rupert, on his part, regarded his sickly and

babyish cousin with a mingled mixture of astonishment and compassion. His long fair curls made him doubtful as to whether he was a boy at all, and his peevishness was so unfamiliar to Rupert's mind, that he watched him as the curious naturalist regards the ways and habits of an unknown animal.

Mrs. Trevor, finding soft words, hard words, cutting words of no avail, shortly left the room.

Then Marion felt a sharp plucking of her sleeve.

"Teach me to read," said the "little wretch," looking rather more amiable than usual.

The flush of pleasure that spread over Lady Fane's white face was enough for Marion.

She brought Rupert's book, and found with pleasure that Edward was further advanced in the amiable vernacular of a "Reading-made-Easy" than she could have hoped.

"My sister is so jealous of my poor little boy," murmured Lady Fane. "So she is of your children, Marion. You must guard against her influence with Godfrey. I know she designs to have his children brought up like her own poor little sad girls."

"No; Godfrey loves them too well," answered Marion, shuddering.

"True; but he is selfish, like us all. And when did anything selfish act rightly?"

Marion looked up, in surprise at a sentiment so unwonted proceeding from the lips of an Asheton.

As if exhausted by having said so much, Lady Fane lay back on the sofa, with closed eyes, and appeared to sleep.

In subdued voice Marion instructed Edward, to whom there appeared no necessity to urge quiet. From this, Marion argued he was not wholly without affections. He loved his mother.

That evening Lady Fane appeared in evening dress in the highest spirits. Mrs. Trevor was subdued into dull astonishment as she contradicted, argued, and refuted her opinions with a force and intelligence it had never been supposed she possessed.

"My dear Cecilia," said her father, as he was wheeled into the dining-room, after that repast was over, and made his appearance at the same time as the dessert and the children, "you have stolen a march upon me. Are you quite prudent in venturing so much?"

"Oh, yes, papa. I have not felt so well for months. Marion has given my boy such a delightful reading-lesson, and intends kindly to do so every day."

And she glanced at her sister in triumph.

Mrs. Trevor turned pale.

"What a charming creature Mrs. Clifton is! No wonder your children are so healthy; she must have been the perfection of a nurse.

I only wish I had had her for Edward. We had such a nice meeting there this evening; Mrs. and Miss Priscilla Flower—a great tea—such kissing and fondling! How dearly your children are loved by everyone, Marion."

Lady Fane, in pleasing herself and plaguing her sister, scarce knew the precipice upon which she was dragging Marion.

"If I were you, Godfrey," said Mrs. Trevor, "I should take my children entirely away from home. The association of objectionable relations, joined to the familiarity and freedom that old servants take, would warrant any parent in removing his child from such intercourse."

"My dear Ellinor," said her father, "where did you pick up such doctrine?"

"It has been forced upon me, my dear father, as it will be forced upon Godfrey, when he sees the deplorable effects of such contamination."

"God forbid that my son should ever see that his father was in error, when he educated him as a thorough English gentleman, among his own people and neighbours."

"The world is very different now, my dear father, to what it was then," answered Godfrey. "I own that I shall not think I have done my duty by my children if I do not show them the difference between their own country and others, and let them choose the one most fitted for them."

"I do not understand you, my son."

"My dear father, pardon me, if I say aught that grieves you, but for some time it has been my intention to take my children to Italy and educate them there."

"From what motive, sir," asked his father, sadly, but firmly.

"No doubt England is a fine and noble country, such, my dear father, as will always make me proud to belong to her. But for the

fine classic mind, the delicate perceptions, the refinements of life, how can one look for such in boisterous, healthy, rude England?"

"Nay," said his father, testily, "can you find such qualities in your fawning, cringing foreigner? Heaven and earth! Godfrey, overmuch study on education hath turned your brain. Pray hurt your poor old father no more by such obliquity of judgment. Make your son a Christian, and an English gentleman, and your daughters worthy daughters of England, and then thank God that they are such."

"I agree with my brother, my dear father," said Mrs. Trevor. "And in looking back upon all I have done for my girls, my only regret is that they have not been brought up on the classic ground of Italy. There, with nothing around them but what is beautiful and noble, with every art and accomplishment in the highest perfection, their senses would become so accustomed to the highest standard

of beauty and excellence that they would at sight imbibe all that one would wish them to know. At present, as my brother says, in homely, unrefined England, how are they to escape being contaminated? How can we expect them to become 'Nature's finished work?'"

"My May," said Mr. Asheton, sorrowfully, "do you think thus?"

"No; I would wish my boy to be educated like his father, and my girls to be English girls, simple and good."

"I am aware of your taste, Marion," said her husband, "and—"

A scuffle among the children interrupted him. Absorbed by their conversation, no one heeded that Edward had emerged from his shelter, and had gone to forage among the dessert for something that he loved. Encountering his cousin Etta on a similar expedition, he could not resist so favourable an opportunity for perpetrating a

piece of mischief on her. With one hand he tightly grasped her curls, while with the other he dexterously squirted some orange juice into her eyes. The little girl, inured to much suffering, resolutely tried not to cry, but in vain—the smart was too great; and just as young Rupert, who had, unknown to Edward, been a witness of his doings, came up to the rescue, she began to shriek. Thus everybody turned round, as Rupert, planting his little sturdy frame against Edward's more fragile, but still twice as old, figure, gave him a well-directed, stout blow on the nose, that sent him reeling on the floor.

As Edward screamed lustily, so did Lady Fane shriek, flying on the instant to raise her injured boy.

"A specimen of an English gentleman," said Godfrey, bitterly. "Come here, sir; what do you mean by such outrageous behaviour?"

"Papa, he hurt cousin Etta, and—"

Lady Fane's shrieks failed suddenly. A dark stream was welling from her mouth. Her husband caught her as she wavered, fainting; and bearing her from the room, it took but a few minutes to place her on a bed, and send for doctors and restoratives.

But a conviction fell upon all simultaneously.

The angel of death was approaching the house.

It was indeed so.

Yet she revived after a while, and the family gathered round the dying bed at her request.

Whispering low, they could just catch her faint words.

"My boy—Marion," she said.

"I will take care of your boy," said Mrs. Trevor; "he shall be the same to me as my own child."

"No, no," she gasped. "Marion, promise; Godfrey, Marion, promise."

"What, dear Cecilia?" said Marion; "what can I do for you?"

"Take my boy—yours, he is yours—oh! promise."

Marion looked at her husband. She felt guilty and wicked in her heart thus to deny a dying request. Yet something within her seemed to say, "Grant it not."

Lady Fane rose with an effort, and taking Godfrey's hand, said distinctly—

"Promise that my boy may live with Marion."

"I promise," said Godfrey, "if his father does."

"Most thankfully do I accept such care for him," said Sir Robert.

"Nay, give me not such a trust," said Marion, hurriedly; "the responsibility is too great, I cannot, may not, accept it."

"Godfrey has promised," said Lady Fane,

with joyful, clear voice. "Take my boy; here, he is yours." She tried to push the terror-stricken child from her side, but the effort was too great.

A deadly paleness came over her face; she struggled vainly to speak. As if interpreting her agonised look of entreaty, Marion slowly, and half deprecatingly, drew the boy towards her, until she encircled him with her arms, while he clasped her close.

The look of suffering changed to one of delight. Lady Fane meekly crossed her white hands on her bosom, as if prepared to pray; but as she did so, her spirit fled, leaving the smile impressed upon the marble features. And Marion, as she gazed upon the dead face wearing that look of peace and happiness, wondered if, after a life of vain nothingness, and a death without preparation, the strong mother's love within her had won for that weak, erring spirit the place in heaven such a smile betokened.

CHAPTER XI.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Dark falls the wings of Death when he alights suddenly, and for the first time, on a prosperous household. A nameless terror seizes the young, a vague despondency the old. Heretofore, they had been sealed with the strong gifts of health and good fortune, which Time had, year by year, cemented to the impervious state of oblivion and indifference, so that Death walked on each side of them, and they feared not.

Their neighbours disappeared, their friends departed from among them, but their threshold was sacred. Death could not pass it. In this delusion they lived, neither wondering nor grateful that their hearth was undiminished.

Upon such a household, the touch of death leaves an always-felt, but never-spoken, conviction of his return. They feel unsafe. The unrighteous jealousy of Mrs. Trevor slept for a time; the irrational crotchets of Mr. Godfrey Asheton were forgotten. All mourned together, as if they felt that death had not left the house;—he was yet waiting.

And he came. Mr. Asheton never recovered the shock of his daughter's death. He lingered on, just kept alive by constant care, until his own state was a burden to him, and he longed to depart.

"I am not old, in the common acception of the word, May Flower, because several of my

work-people are hale and hearty yet, though they number many more days than I do. But I am old in heart. Why is it, that we of the upper class, born to no toil, weakened by no burdens, taxed by no trouble, should sink into the grave worn out and old; while those who have borne the burden and heat of the day, toil on, until Death, coming, touches them even at work? You do not answer, May? You cannot. Then I will tell you. We are aged through our own luxuries, daintinesses, and humours, until we become satiated and disgusted, and that which pleased us before is insufferable at last; and thus we go on, the healthy blood and good spirit given us by our gracious Lord, vitiated in one case, and contaminated in the other. Make my boy, Rupert, a good Christian. Tell him his grandfather's last wishes, that he is to work, work hard, for the benefit of all around him. He is not to think only of Rupert Asheton; God will re-

member him while he is mindful of others. Then, May Flower, your boy, you may hope, will not die of old age at sixty-nine, worn out with doing nothing. But I remembered my God in time, thanks be to His unspeakable mercy; and you will be blest, child, because you were the means thereof."

Much need had the little mother of this prophecy; but she was not all perfect, and her fears being keen and bitter, a mist hid these words from her memory.

Mr. Asheton survived his daughter three months, and then died calmly, his hand in his wife's clasp—a smile on his lips.

It is not to be supposed that the good father left his son in ignorance of his opinion and wishes regarding his grandchildren, or the deference that should be paid to the wishes of their mother.

On the contrary, without intending it, he had rather confirmed an idea lately implanted

in Godfrey's mind, that Marion, in fear for the influence she was about to lose, had instigated this appeal in her favour. Thus it fell powerless.

Godfrey intended but to take six months to adjust all his affairs at home, to reconcile his mother to the change, to prepare Marion for a separation from one, if not two, of her children while that mother lived, and to go, fulfilling his intention of educating his son abroad.

But even though he unfolded his plans by degrees, the anger of his mother startled him.

"I do not go abroad with you, Godfrey; I die at home, and will be buried in the grave with my dear Mr. Asheton."

"Mother, I did not intend to take you from home. I would delay longer, but Rupert is now five years old. Nothing but my father's state has delayed me so long."

"And your wife?"

"As long as you wish it, Marion will remain with you."

"What! Separate the mother from her children, and hope for a blessing? Never! Oh, my dear Mr. Asheton, our mourning for you is to be felt in bitterness, not resignation."

"My dear mother," interrupted Mrs. Trevor, "I intend accompanying Godfrey. I will be everything that a mother can desire to her children, as Marion must know. Godfrey is in some measure necessitated to leave Marion behind, because she already possesses more influence over Rupert than is good for him; besides, she has Edward. I may fairly assume, she arranged with my poor sister, ere her lamented death, that she was to have the charge of him. To what otherwise can I attribute the extraordinary fact of the forgetfulness of myself, her own sister. Nothing but kindness to the dead has sealed my lips; but I can assure you, my heart has cried shame for a deed both uncalled for and discreditable."

But Mrs. Asheton was too indignant to be talked down.

"I desire that you leave me here alone with Edward. I will not consent that Marion should be parted from her husband and children. See, here is Marion. Tell me, May, will you give up your children? Will you suffer Godfrey to take them?"

"Godfrey is too just to do so, without my consent," she answered.

"That is true, Marion; but still I ask it of you."

"Ask me rather for my heart, torn, bleeding and wounded, from my side," was her answer.

Mrs. Asheton kissed her fondly.

Mrs. Trevor was about to speak, but Godfrey, with a peremptory gesture, prevented her.

"I understand you," he said, bitterly and coldly, "and I do not ask again."

At first, both Mrs. Asheton and Marion

felicitated themselves upon this easy adjustment of the mooted question. But not for long.

Day by day, hour by hour, this feeling dwindled away. It was impossible for one apportioned by nature with a heart gentle as Marion's to live at war with any one, much less the husband of her love, the father of her children.

The cold formal manner that Godfrey now adopted towards her was more hard to bear than any other mode he could have adopted. Not all her winning ways, not all her loving devotion, her unerring judgment as regarded his other wishes (and rarely was she gifted with the sweet smiles of tenderness), elicited one spark of affection, or broke through that icy bearing.

Her eyes, usually so soft, became larger, distended by fear; her sweet face was pale and attenuated, its innocent, frank expression gone,

and yet, much as she suffered, Godfrey endured more, and showed it.

He was indeed too just to follow out his wishes against her consent, but these wishes had become part of himself. Moping and melancholy, he wandered about his home, a more wretched and hopeless creature than when he was first introduced to the reader. And, as if to worry him still further, Mrs. Flower, taking advantage of their hour of affliction, had once more established herself in Asheton Court, as chief consoler and adviser in their grief.

Armed with sermons upon all subjects, she trotted up daily with undiminished zeal and good humour. And if at all conscious of any rebuff from the stately Godfrey, or intended rudeness from the less courteous Mrs. Trevor, she glossed it over at once, by saying—

"Ah! poor things, how they feel! It is easy to see what they must have suffered by their

tempers; grief often turns that way. Constant must he mindful to give them all the consolations of the church."

To Godfrey she became intolerable; she discussed all their affairs with the utmost frankness; she discoursed about the children until the whole world knew the secrets of the Asheton nurseries, and she held up Master Asheton as a model in all his sayings and doings to every little dirty beggar brat in the school.

"The example is so good, my dear Godfrey," buzzed she. "I am delighted to have such an example to hold up to them; it benefits the boys a great deal more than all Constant's sermons."

Godfrey may be pardoned for wishing the English Channel between himself and Asheton Court, or Mrs. Flower kindly taken by Providence to heaven.

This state of things became intolerable both

to husband and wife, yet neither showed any disposition to give way.

One day, all unknown to each other, they both wandered out by separate paths, to pour forth in secret solitude the grief that was killing them. Suddenly they met, at the very point where Godfrey had told her, whether she accepted him or not, he would love no other woman.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH MRS. TREVOR HAS AN OPPORTUNITY OF AT LAST TELLING MARION SHE IS NOBODY.

MARION started. Godfrey was unmoved.

"I—I thought Rupert was with you," she asked.

"I know nothing about him," he answered.

"Are they—are the children, then, not out?"

"I have not seen them to-day."

"Oh, Godfrey, do you remember this spot?" and she clasped his arm, with a gush of sudden tears.

"Yes, I do; but I have just been to visit another, where I heard words that I have treasured in my heart, only to find them worthless. Let me pass."

"Nay; tell me what they were, if you love me?"

"Love you! I think I have proved what I said here. Can you say as much, when you recall the words in which you taught Count Julian the meaning of real love, unselfish love?"

He left her, smitten with a sudden conviction.

"Yet he asks more of me than my life. More than in my wildest love I ever thought to give. But he ceases to care for his children! Not seen them to-day! His children, our little children, so beloved, so idolized. Nay 'twere better—yes, it must be—it shall be. God will strengthen me. I will but make one last appeal."

Swiftly, as if to banish thought, Marion ran home. Without a pause, she went straight to Mrs. Trevor's room, and knocked for admission.

Giving her no time for surprise or remonstrance, Marion, with clasped hands and beseeching eyes, thus entreated her.

"Oh, Ellinor, use your influence with my husband, and beseech him to remember that God, in giving his children two parents, meant that each should take a share in the burden, the love, the care. I may be uneducated in your sense of the word, but can a mother teach that which is wrong to her child? Is it necessary for a loving heart to be learned or clever? Can I be wrong in wishing my children to be known and loved among their fellow-creatures? Is it right that they should be instructed? There is contamination among those with whom they are placed, their mother included. Oh, Ellinor,

if they imbibe the creed—'Stand by, I am holier than thou,' what is to prevent God pronouncing on them that dread requital—'Take thou the lower place.'" Marion paused, overpowered.

"Oh, if you bring religion into the matter, I have nothing to say. Though, with a man so conscientious as my brother, so exact in all his religious duties, attending church so regularly, having family prayers, and many other things that few young men think of now-a-days, I should have considered such remarks quite unnecessary."

"It is true, he is conscientious in such things, yet it does not follow but that he may perform them in the spirit of the Pharisee, who gave his exact tythes and repeated his long prayers. I fear sometimes for him, for, as regards his children, he puts himself in the place of God. All is to be done for them by him; nothing is left for the Father of us all to

perform, who can bless the smallest effort, and yet leave the over-anxious parent without a ray of his softening influence. I speak thus openly to you, Ellinor, because to you I owe it that I am in this misery."

"And I am proud to think that it is so; proud that, at least with the head of the family, I yet hold my proper place and influence. Rest contented with having usurped that place with others."

"I neither sought for such place, Ellinor, nor wished to supplant you. And in proof of the power you hold in your hands, I beseech you, by the love you bear your own children, let me not be separated from mine."

"Oh, you begin to consider you must give way. Quite time, I can assure you; no one but my brother would have borne with your obstinacy so long. As for influencing him as you wish, I shall do no such thing. I am even more alive than he is to the danger of

their remaining under your influence, and the society here, besides the example of so spoilt a boy as young Edward."

"The charge of that boy was forced upon me; my first duty is to my own children."

"Nevertheless, Marion, you have undertaken the charge; and as you appear very full of your religious quotations, let me beg you to study a few for his and your benefit."

"You will not help me, then?"

"So far from it, knowing my brother as well as I do, I can but uphold him, pity him, mourn for him; of course he will soon lose all interest in those fine children, so clever, so like himself; and having no happiness at home, he will accompany me abroad. You can then educate your children, if you know how, after your own fashion. It is all very well wringing your hands and looking miserable, you are not so much to be pitied as my brother. He has ceased to care for his boy, he no

longer delights to watch Isabel, and as for the little Mabel, whose love for her father is perfectly beautiful, and in whom he is so wrapt—"

"Cease, cease," murmured Marion; and covering her face with her hands, as if to hide the agony of her heart, she cried, "Oh! Godfrey, Godfrey, take my children, if it must be so; but you do it at the price of my affection."

Marion's hands were gently withdrawn from her face. "Wherefore so, Marion?" asked Godfrey, who stood before her.

"Because you will evermore seem cruel to me."

"And why? Am I more cruel to you than you to me? Am I so harsh a father that I am not to be trusted? Because I have set my heart upon a plan of education, am I therefore devoid of all love and affection?"

"You have but little for me."

"Do you seek to win more?"

"I have said, take my children, take all. I would rather lose them all than that they should cease to be objects of love to you."

"Marion, my Marion, is such your feeling? I thank you. I owe your reluctance to no mistrust. We have wronged her, Ellinor."

"How could any other motive be assigned to conduct so inconceivable?" murmured Mrs. Trevor, becoming pale in her turn.

"Marion," said her husband, unheeding Mrs. Trevor, "we have been miserable, because we have not confided in each other; hear what I have to say, and by the full confession I make to you, promise that you unveil your heart to me. It is my desire, my wish (these two words but faintly express what I would have you conscious that I feel) to take all my children abroad with me. I have, as you know, never said as much before; yet am I sure that, in leaving one behind (one who makes me love her

with a strange infatuation), I shall be so wearying for her presence, so wondering as to her growth and pretty ways, it may be that the pleasure I derive from the improvement of the other two will be marred. I am anxious, desirous, to have my children to myself, without their mother. It is not that I love their mother less than when I married her; but, I acknowledge, a different love has taken possession of me—it is that which I bear for the children she has given me. They must be mine entirely; if I own their love, their obedience, to any other influence than my own, I cease to care for it at all. When I can say to myself, they think, speak, feel, only as I wish, moved solely by love and deference to me, I will restore them to their mother. My heart is bared before you."

"If my children are to lose their father's love and interest, through a mistaken (ah, how mistaken!) fear of their mother's influence,

take them, take them all. I can bear their absence better than his estrangement from them."

Godfrey drew her towards him, and clasping her close, said, as he gathered back the curls from her face, that he might the better see it:—

"Yet, Marion, I love you thus much, I cannot take them at the price of your affection." For a moment, Marion forgot her children in the great joy that she was indeed so dear to him."

Vivid blushes succeeded each other quickly, and the large tears of irrepressible emotion rose to her eyes. But even with them came the eager wish, the strong desire, to show how she valued his love.

"Take them, Godfrey; have I proved that I know what real love is? Take them, and be still as dear to my heart as before."

And it is ever so. The more fine the tissues of the heart, the more noble are its

deeds. The wealth of love, endurance, and self-abnegation, that pours itself forth without sound, without voice, unwhispered, from a gracious spirit, is scarcely known, is not felt, by the murmuring, querulous performers of their duty, and nothing more. The pure and tempered steel bends even to a circle, yet returns uninjured and unsullied to its original form, as if no hand had touched it, no force had struggled with it. Even so with the noble heart. What it gives is given with that greatness that leaves no trace of obligation; what is granted bears about the gift no mark of favour. Magnanimous in its decision, noble in its accomplishment, sublime in the faith and trust it exhibits, who can wonder that the trivial, selfish, give-and-take earthling cannot comprehend, much less value, a noble heart.

Godfrey kissed her weeping eyes.

"You have redeemed the words you uttered

at the meeting of the pathways, and which, spoken to another, I had neither right to hear nor claim to mention. But they staid by me somehow, Marion; and I fretted as much at the weakness of your professions, when they were called upon to prove themselves in deeds, as at the difficulty I encountered in the furtherance of my wishes."

"It is done. If we have acted wrongly by our children, may God forgive us both."

"Amen," answered her husband.

And now Mrs. Trevor (an earthling) began to discover that foolish, weak, ignorant, as she had considered her sister-in-law, all these sins were nothing in comparison to the whimsical inconsistencies of her character.

After fretting herself and her husband into an almost state of derangement, through an obstinate determination to have her own way, she no sooner is persuaded to turn, than she does so with more rapidity than a weather-

cock driven round by a tempest wind. Not another word of upbraiding, not a tear, not a sigh; arranging with heartless care and unnecessary pains, all the preliminaries for her children's absence for an indefinite period. Cheerful, active, satisfied, and, above everything in the world, never neglecting for one single moment the exacting, troublesome amount of duty imposed upon her by the care and education of that dreadful boy, Edward Fane! Mrs. Trevor gave her up. For once, she had met with a character wholly inexplicable.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH GRISELDA-LIKE MARION MAKES HER FIRST SACRIFICE.

"AND pray, when do these people leave us?" asked Mrs. Asheton of Marion.

In addition to whatever of heartburning Marion might be concealing so effectually in the depths of her self-abnegation, she was the recipient of all Mrs. Asheton's indignant remarks against her own children—the silent hearer of all her strong upbraidings against herself.

After having given her opinions to both Godfrey and Ellinor, without producing any

effect, Mrs. Asheton, keenly mortified at their want of consideration for herself—sensitively alive yet to the loss of her dear Mr. Asheton, which loss had so changed her position in the family — doting on her grandchildren, and regarding Marion's chief merits (as they all appeared to do) to be that she was the mother of them—shut herself up in a dignified sullenness. They pursued their way without informing her; so should she go on in her daily routine of life, allowing none of their preparations to interfere with her rules.

She was as angry with Marion as she was with her son and daughter; and felt she had more reason to be so, because she was considered as quite a sufficient companion for her, though unsuitable to them. An insult! in every way an insult.

"I fear it will be soon," sighed Marion, in answer to her question. "The travelling carriage and the *fourgon* have arrived."

"Preposterous! I thought railways were all over the kingdom now."

"The railways are to take these carriages. Godfrey does not wish the children to go in those furnished for the public."

"And pray, may I ask who is that detestable looking creature, with as much hair on his face as if he was condemned to wear the tail of one of the coach-horses?"

"He is the courier."

"I am glad, at least, that they are to have one with them who can speak some language besides English. My daughter Ellinor is not so great a linguist as she imagines."

"This man speaks five languages perfectly."

"One would be too many for me, if I had to listen to it out of a cavity of hair. Disgusting! And pray, have you again given way? Are the children's English nurses to come home, after they are provided with foreign ones?

"Yes, mother."

"God forgive you, my dear, I cannot. Oh, my poor, dear, lamented Mr. Asheton, how has all your kindness been wasted! The children you doted on are sacrificed by both father and mother."

Marion never lay down at night on the bed, in which her beating heart would not permit her to rest, without at least thanking God the day for the separation was not fixed; she never rose in the morning without the choking feeling in the throat, produced by the fear that it would be settled ere night.

And yet must it be soon, every preparation was complete, nothing more remained to be done. Her mother's heart could suggest no further need for the pleasure or benefit of her idolized children.

She hoped, she was convinced, Godfrey felt too much himself to fix the woful hour.

But selfish love is very calculating.

"Marion, will you walk with me to the sea-shore this morning?" asked Godfrey.

She assented, but with a strange fear.

Never had Godfrey been so amiable, so cheerful, so prone to little kindlinesses, quite foreign to his unbending nature.

"Ah," thought the little sensitive mother, "he is going to tell me the day—the hour."

They reached the point where he had spoken to her, told her of his love—his wishes.

"When I am gone, May, come often to this spot, and think kindly of me," he said, pausing, and throwing one arm about her.

"And you go, when, Godfrey?"

"Soon, dearest, nay, very, very soon. May, it is here that I mean to bid you farewell."

"It is no need to be here, I shall feel it as deeply anywhere."

"My Marion, dear, gentle wife, if I am to

effect the purpose for which I take my children abroad, it will be difficult to do so, with any remembrance, any painful recollection of a parting from their English home, from, in fact, their mother."

"I will command myself; I have been very good, Godfrey."

"A thousand times better than I could have hoped; but at the last, Marion, I fear you will give way."

"I think not—I hope not."

"To spare both you and them, I have arranged—"

"Godfrey, hush, say no more. I must see the last of my children; I must kiss and bless them, I must whisper to my boy, my Rupert, how his mother loves, dotes on him; he must not forget her—oh! he must not—I must see my children to the last moment, Godfrey; they are to bid farewell to their mother."

"Marion, be calm; hush, love. How you

sob! Oh! May, forgive me, I fear I have done wrong—they are gone."

"Gone!—where?"

"They were to leave while we were absent."

She had the quickest perception, that little tender heart;—he had no time to say more.

With a wild cry, with a sudden strength, she bounded from him, and he saw her light form glancing through the trees like some flitting spirit. He followed her with a speed of which he did not think himself capable, but he only caught glimpses of her hurrying on.

Poor Marion! she reached the hall-door in time to see the weeping grandmother borne away in tears, the marks of heavy wheels deep in the gravel. She staggered, breathless and stricken.

"Madam, pray come this way—come to this

upper room. You can see the carriages for more than a mile; and Master Asheton was looking out of the window, calling you."

And Stephenson, Mrs. Asheton's own maid, in pity for the poor, little, bereaved mother, left her mistress to the care of the housekeeper, while she almost carried Marion up the stairs.

It was a long, low room, at the top of the house, used by Stephenson herself, and from the windows could be traced for some distance the carriage road. Marion clutched the iron bar, to steady herself. Yes, there was her boy, leaning far out of the window, looking back. Stephenson waved the handkerchief —the mother had not strength to do it. It was seen and answered.

"He sees you, madam; he sees you, the darling, noble boy. I knew, for all they told him such fine stories of what he was going to see, he cared for nothing but his dear mamma."

"Aunt May, Aunt May," said a peevish voice, pulling at her gown.

"What is it, Edward," answered Marion, as she always did the motherless boy, in her gentlest voice.

"Look at me, Aunt May. Why do you gaze out of the window? I want to speak to you."

She placed one trembling hand on his head, answering—

"Soon, Edward, soon, I will speak to you."

But she never turned her eyes from the one spot.

"Will you go away, sir?" said Stephenson, in an angry whisper.

"No, I won't. Aunt May, Rupert is gone, and only think, he has taken his best whip with him, and he cracked it as they drove from the door, as if he was so glad to go. Isn't it a shame?"

Stephenson, seeing the spasm of agony that began to throb in Marion's throat, snatched the boy to remove him, but he screamed, and resisted. Even in that moment, her heart almost stopping, for the next turn would hide her darlings from her sight, she just sobbed—

"Wait, let him wait!"

But it was too much. The good Stephenson knew the carriage must have passed out of sight, for the quivering eyelids closed, the clasping hands gave way, and she would have fallen but for the timely entrance of Godfrey, who caught her as she wavered.

Utterly insensible, he bore her to her room.

"Fane," he said, "I must leave her now, in this state, otherwise I know that I could not part from her. Will you comfort her? Will you tell her all I would say? Oh! Marion, I cannot, no, I will not leave you thus."

"Pray, be advised by me, and go at once.

You can do her no good. Write to her the first opportunity. Rely upon my best brotherly attentions; but if you wish to be consistent, go at once."

When Marion awoke from her insensibility, her mother and Sir Robert were watching by her couch. She looked eagerly round in a moment.

"Godfrey is gone. He thought it better, for both your sakes, that you should be spared a parting."

If Marion felt any emotion, she was skilful in hiding it, even from the self-interested eyes of Sir Robert Fane.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISSY AND SIR ROBERT FANE EXCHANGE CONFIDENCES.

"STEPHENSON," said Mrs. Asheton, as she was being wheeled about in her garden-chair, by that faithful handmaiden, "I think my poor dear is better, she has more colour in her cheeks to-day."

"The young madam is so gentle, madam; she never complains. But the first thing in the morning, and the last thing ere it is dusk, she taps at my door, and asks leave to look out

of my window. Then, madam, I see how she suffers."

"Poor darling; but it is all her own fault, she should have remained firm."

"Well, madam, we in 'The Room' say, never anyone before dare thwart Mr. Asheton as she has done; and she only gave way, madam, for fear he should cease to love the children. I was thinking, madam, if it was not a liberty to propose it, and as we are not likely to see company for some time, the young madam would take it very kind if that upper room was left wholly for her use, to go in and out when she pleased."

"What sort of room is it, Stephenson?"

"It is a fine, large room, madam, only low, with the pretty casemented window in the archway of the roof. Newly papered and painted, it would be not unfit for the young madam. Then she could go pray for her children whenever it pleased her."

"Pray?"

"Yes, madam, I know she does; for though I always leave the room, I have met her coming from there, and I knew from her face she had been praying."

"I think my dear Mr. Asheton was right, Stephenson, when he said, we were like the family of Tobit—an angel had entered our house unawares, and we none of us knew it. I will have your room newly done up, and presented to my daughter. And you shall go to — or, stay, I will write to our London upholsterer, who shall send down a pretty carpet, and nice furniture and paper."

"And I will put in the children's pictures, madam, and all the little things they mostly loved, which she has collected in her present room. It is so large a room, madam, it has three other windows besides the double one, and part can be portioned off for a sleeping room, and part for a sitting room."

"And you must also be particular, Stephenson, in ornamenting it with pretty china. Select some of the prettiest and nicest. Don't refrain because it is rare; let my daughter have all the best things in the house put into her room, that she may have pretty objects to amuse her."

"She is much better since she received Mr. Asheton's letter. And if Master Fane was not so troublesome—"

"Indeed he is, Stephenson; when I contrast him with our darlings, it is too much for me. I have remonstrated with her spending so much time on him, when he is so obstinate and perverse, and she answered me, 'Mother, if I do my duty by this boy, God will make strangers do theirs by my children, perhaps.' It was pretty of her, Stephenson, very, very pretty, such a thought."

And the whilom haughty eyes of the once imperious Madam Asheton overflowed with tears.

"It would do both you and the young madam good, madam, to have a little company. When Sir Robert goes, you will be a sad pair to comfort each other, madam. That is a nice cheerful young lady, the younger Miss Flower."

"A very good thought. I will write and invite her this day."

Prissy obeyed the summons with high delight. Not that she evinced any pleasure in visiting Mrs. Asheton. On the contrary, Prissy considered it only due to herself to "ride the high horse" with Mrs. Asheton, and make it distinctly understood to her, she would accept no invitation to Asheton Court but to please May, which, as Mrs. Asheton clearly did not expect her to come for anything else, was amiably settled between them, and without reference to the fact that Prissy's dignified stateliness was utterly lost upon Mrs. Asheton as a mark of her displeasure. Had

she thought about it at all, probably she would have praised such evident efforts to ape the Ashetons.

May's "Thank you, mother," when she heard of the room about to be prepared for her sole use, was low, but sufficiently emphatic to speed Mrs. Asheton on with redoubled vigour to get it ready. And a partition having been broken into that opened into a smaller room, this served as bath and wardrobe room.

No queen could have desired a prettier apartment, with its quaint corners, its gabled roof, its beautiful and singular furniture, all illumined and shadowed in various picturesque lights, caused by so many windows. And when invested with an attraction so sacred in its nature, as being the spot from whence she had last seen her children, no wonder that Marion hallowed and loved it with equal intensity.

"I think," remarked Sir Robert to Prissy, "you all appear so much more cheerful and comfortable, that you hardly require my presence any longer."

"No, that we don't," answered the simple-hearted Prissy; "gentlemen are so much in the way when there is only one, unless, indeed, like papa, he is always writing sermons."

"Which I need not assure you is not my vocation," said Sir Robert. "Your sister appears very ill."

"Yes; mamma and I cannot think what is the matter with her, though we have guessed and guessed, and recommended her quantities of remedies."

"I shall walk over to the Woodhead this evening, and give her my advice," said Sir Robert; "and you won't forget, Priscilla, that if ever you or Marion require help, call upon me."

"Oh, but I don't think we shall now, thank you. Those tiresome people are all gone, you know, and we intend leading very quiet lives; and May designs to teach herself and me all manner of things, and then there is Edward—what a naughty boy he is, Sir Robert."

"I am afraid he is."

"My goodness, I forgot he was your son—isn't he your son? You always call him Sir, and he always calls you Sir, so that really I quite forgot."

"Don't apologise. I wish to ask you one question. Whose was that letter, the one which gave Marion such pleasure this morning?"

"It was from her sister, Lady Gordon; and it praised her very much for all she had done; and said she had decided very well, and that God would reward her. And I know how, Sir Robert. Mr. Asheton will bring his

children home quite ruined with foreign ways, and then May will set them all right, and then he will love her more than ever, and they will never quarrel about the children again, but live happy, and have a great many more."

"I think three children quite enough in a family, Priscilla. I should never desire more."

"Well, but what business is it of yours if other people like to have ten? I always think it such a good thing that nobody thinks alike; not but that Mr. Asheton is very stupid that he does not think like May, because she is always right."

"*Ergo*, he is always wrong."

"I know nothing about *Ergo*. *Ergo* may just think as he chooses, and he is sure to be wrong if he thinks like Mr. Asheton."

"You don't like him."

"No, that I don't."

"He used to tell me he liked you."

"And so he ought. I am not like him."

Sir Robert could not but laugh.

"I will tell you what I will do, if you desire it. "I'll go and shoot Asheton, and get Marion a better husband."

"You may be as wicked as you please, but May will never marry anybody else."

"Why not?"

"Because she won't."

"Have you no better reason?"

"What is better than that she won't?"

"Your arguments are unanswerable, so good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye, but I wouldn't think of shooting Mr. Asheton if I was you, because you will be hanged and he will be pitied, and he does not deserve to be that, any more than you to be hanged."

"Is that girl a fool or not, I wonder?" thought Sir Robert; and he never settled the

question rightly all the way to the Woodhead.

"Mrs. Flower, you must send back your daughter to her native Italy. And I can tell you, Miss Flower, that it will not be long before you have a summons there. How those unlucky people, full up to their eyes of English whims and prejudices, will get on, without some kind friend to help them, I know not. You will be everything to them; so I trust, if Mrs. Trevor writes, you will not fail to go."

"There," Sir Robert thinking again. "Now I shall be off to enjoy myself. I have managed matters pretty well for a year or so, I fancy, without compromising my self-esteem, yclepted honour. I certainly suggested to Mrs. Trevor to have Miss Flower over, but it is not my fault if Miss Flower puts spokes into the wheels of Mr. Asheton's returning sense of domestic ties; for I suppose he will

be having fits of that sort. At all events I shall think very ill of her talents as a disappointed woman, if she does not take so fine an opportunity to have her revenge upon her usurping cousin."

CHAPTER XV.

HOW MUCH THE LITTLE ASHETONS GAINED AFTER SIX MONTHS' EDUCATION IN THE CLASSIC LAND OF ITALY.

As far as Mr. Asheton and Mrs Trevor were concerned, it is needless to say that their first essay of foreign habits and manners made them truly miserable.

Mr. and the Miss Trevors, not being allowed to feel anything without the leave of Mrs. Trevor, kept a discreet silence upon every subject, while the little small Ashetons, amused

with the novelty of travelling, retained their good humour and spirits in a surprising manner—that is, surprising to their father and aunt.

Carrying about with them the laws and maxims of Asheton Court, they had of course to pay exorbitantly for the performance of them, while that performance was so imperfect, as to be worse to bear than to go without.

Foreigners are not disposed to let "my lor Anglais" lord it, without good fees for such a luxury; and the more they "lord it," of course the greater the toll.

The consciousness of being imposed upon, without the power of discovering the imposition, is peculiarly galling to an upright mind. And Mr. Asheton entered Rome with a strong feeling of disgust for everything and everybody, as his prevailing sentiment for foreign ways and foreign people.

A beautiful and spacious Palazzo, the freedom from incessant worries, caused by the journey, the exquisite air, the beautiful sky, and, above all, Mrs. Trevor's restoration to her usual spirits, which had been rather shattered by the many unexpected nuisances encountered in her El Dorado, soon restored him. And he commenced vigorously the education of his children.

One drop of comfort had soothed him through all—they were now his own. None other had the right to say, "Do this," "Do that." For though it was highly necessary for his own delectation that Mrs. Trevor should always be ready to offer her advice, and to exhilarate him with her energy, she was by no means to interfere with his children. They were in a separate part of the house. He was father, mother, and would have been nurse to them, only he did not know how to perform the necessary duties of that functionary.

He was fortunate in tutors and nurses, as most people are, who pay what they are asked, and make no demand.

Many excellent and very superior people called upon them, and proffered pyramids of advice, founded upon vast stones of experience.

As both Mr. Asheton and his sister felt rather like the Babes in the Wood, lost in a forest of unknown habits and languages, they were disposed to think very kindly of all the Robins that brought them olive branches. Which said Robins would have been browbeaten in England, had they presumed upon "friendly relations," without fitting introductions and lengthened trial; not that this intercourse was wise, or beneficial to themselves.

A great fluency in foreign speech was an unfailing recommendation to Mrs. Trevor, and an extreme interest in the welfare and educa-

tion of the young Ashetons, a proportionate claim upon their father's good opinion.

As when things come to the worst they must mend, the vexations of their journey brought into happy contrast their present freedom from such annoyances.

Had they been suddenly placed down in Rome from Asheton Court, they would, in all probability, have never settled comfortably. But after five or six weeks of utter misery, travelling, life in Rome appeared invested with charms no other life ever possessed.

In addition to this, Godfrey Asheton having led but a dull and monotonous life—rather like the fungus that rises and lives within the cavity of some splendid old beech tree, which looks down in disdain upon the little leaves that go hustling and bustling about in the world, preferring his grand hole and stolid position to their free measure of earth—Godfrey Asheton could not but be animated and enlivened by the new

and wonderful sights that now surrounded him.

With a fine taste, a correct judgment, and a thorough appreciation of the beautiful, he entered with great spirit and interest into all the different classes of people and things, that the pursuit of such studies rendered imperative. He was not at Asheton Court—he was but one of many odds and ends from England. He began to find it was pleasant to unbend. It was a great relief to get down from his stilts, and to discover that it mattered to no one whether he was on them or not. They did not appear to comprehend that Mr. Asheton of Asheton Court owed it to society and the world in general to sit up in high state, a model for mankind. They were perfectly content and satisfied that he should speak, think, and act exactly like themselves. At Asheton Court, there was a great sameness, and a dispassionate existence, that had no other excite-

ment than a casual infringement of rules, which was not an agreeable mode of experiencing variety. Thus what appeared dulness to votaries of the world, was full of enjoyment for Mr. Asheton. He attended the different studios. He had tutors for himself, and he encouraged the visits of every one of whom he was told were remarkable for something. These employments made his life full of business, and the busy are generally happy.

Mrs. Trevor's good spirits lasted but a short time. She might have been Solomon in petticoats, but she was incapable of imparting her wisdom. She had intended to be a sort of reigning queen in literature and the arts, yet she more than suspected she was only considered her brother's housekeeper. She had been necessitated to demand Mr. Trevor's help in managing that house, and had had the mortification to discover that he knew Italian better than she did herself. Having informed

her brother he need trouble himself in no manner of way concerning the internal arrangement of their joint establishment, she was in danger of having to implore his interference ere a week was over.

Nothing went right; and after having expended the money intended for three months in one, she was obliged to confess that foreign servants and foreign charges were utterly incomprehensible to her, entirely despicable, yet contumelious and irritating.

Mr. Asheton and Mr. Trevor were not more successful, and their domestics troubles kept steadily increasing, notwithstaning all the advice and help they received.

When people are worth robbing, and innocently unconscious of the manner in which they are robbed, their servants put a limit to their consciences of a relative measure, much after the fashion of Lord Clive's vindication of himself regarding Indian bribes:—"My lord, when

I consider what I might have taken, and what I did take, I am surprised at my own moderation."

But when they are suspected—when they are taxed with it, when they are found out—then bid adieu to anything like a limit for the future. If you forgive them, they laugh at you in secret, and steal double. If you dismiss them, they become your enemies, and lie with such effrontery that you begin to doubt the evidence of your own ears.

The above remarks will be found word for word in Mrs. Trevor's private journal, headed, "An Article on Foreign Servants."

They were all greatly relieved when Miss Flower came to their assistance, and, during the absence of her own family at Sorrento, took up her residence under the chaperonship of Mrs. Trevor until their return.

That Godfrey felt a twinge when he saw Beatrice is undoubted, and it was with a

tremor in his voice that he asked, "How Marion looked?"

"Perfectly well," was the reply of Miss Beatrice. "I never saw her appear better or more happy; she has a gallop every day on the sands with her nephew, and we can hear their laughter up at the Woodhead, as they race against each other."

"What, can that sickly little fellow ride?" asked Mrs. Trevor; "I thought he was too great a coward to mount a donkey."

"Marion has taken great pains with him, and has made him fond of it."

"Marion had much better teach him to be a gentleman. Of what earthly use is it whether he can ride or not. So like one of her whims."

"And my mother?" asked Mr. Asheton, a disappointment oppressing him, spite of all he could do."

"She appears perfectly happy and well.

They go on in clock-work fashion, never deviating from it in the smallest respect. Priscilla is almost always there—"

"Ah, very fit companions for each other. You may be sure, my dear Godfrey, that they suit each other admirably, and are entirely happy."

Mrs. Trevor had seen the little twinge of conscience, the slight touch of disappointment. If the twinge was to become a pang, and the touch increase to a general over-allishness, what a blow to Mrs. Trevor. Mr. Sark's seam in the mine might as well have been the seam in a shirt, for aught good it was doing in the way of money-getting, which was sad for the Trevors, as they had already spent a great deal of it in anticipation.

It was more than ever a matter of necessity, their remaining, not only abroad, but tacked to an establishment that paid the lion's share.

If Miss Beatrice Flower permitted herself to be surprised that Mr. Godfrey Asheton, after leaving his wife, should inquire about her health at all, or, turning the other way, should be disgusted (as most kind-hearted, goody sorts of people would have been) that he asked so little, she had no cause to think the latter of her children.

As they sat talking, Rupert and Issa were ushered into the room by one of their tutors, in order to show their father what progress they were making.

Down went books and slates, they rushed up to Miss Flower—

"Mamma, mamma, where is mamma?"

Rupert threw himself into an agony of grief on the floor at the answer, while the Demoiselle Issa had to be carried off sobbing like baby Mabel, instead of comporting herself as a little lady of five years should do.

If the father, with his iron will, was bent

upon lessening the influence of their mother upon the children, no less strong was the tenacity with which they clung to every remembrance of her. He was too just to forbid any mention of her, trusting that when their English nurses left, and the foreign ones took their places, an inevitable result would follow, consequent upon their means of communicating being so circumscribed. But they were children of free, frank natures. If they could not speak of the dear, darling mamma to their governesses and nurses, papa must hear all they had to say. And had he not been steeped in the waters of pride, and made as invulnerable to common sense and good-feeling as Achilles was by the waters of Styx to swords and lances, he must have been touched by their artless love, still more by the many proofs they gave of her influence, tending solely to making him the most loved and honoured of human beings. He had experi-

enced some little trouble in managing them, and on more than one occasion Rupert had said, "I will try, papa, to do as you wish, for mamma will be unhappy if she hears that I have displeased you."

While Issa was even more decided, quoting her mother's words, and imitating all her ways, as much as her baby mind could remember. She, a determined little Asheton, showed the exclusive nature she inherited from her father, by disdaining to love or care for any being but her mother. What she wore, how she looked, and the words she used, were all treasured in her little heart with a wonderful tenacity, and quoted with a passion and pride that the foreign nurses dared not contradict.

Godfrey lost sight of the great advantage Miss Flower would prove to them, in the mortification he experienced on discovering that the mere sight of her awoke in the

children's hearts their adoration of their mother; besides reviving all the little traits of her love and influence, which he had hoped the separation of six months would have obliterated.

Great was his chagrin that it took many days of incessant watching and forbearance, on his part, to soften down their irritation and disappointment; and even that was not so difficult to endure as their never-ending questions as to why she did not come to them, and when she would come. To use subterfuge with any one was utterly incongruous to Mr. Asheton's character, but to do so with his children was a direct violation of it. He was, therefore, often in such a state of perplexity and disturbance from those strangely shrewd questions that children are so apt to put, and as apt to insist upon being literally answered, that he even solicited Miss Flower's advice to free himself from it. Not being so

scrupulous as himself, she used her own measures, and by degrees the children became once more happy and contented.

What they had gained at present by this sojourn in the classic land of all the fine arts may be summed up in a few words.

Rupert especially admired all equestrian statues, and would wish that their stony riders might dismount. Then would he take their place, and with a magic sign transform his steed of marble to one of flesh and blood, on whose back he could swiftly gallop to see his dear mamma.

Issa made adoration to the effigies of saints and virgins, in part love of spangled garments, and part for some fancied resemblance in their fair waxen faces to her mother.

Baby Mabel openly saluted every picture of angels and beauties as "Mamma, mamma, pretty mamma; me must kiss her." But they all three spoke Italian quite wonderfully.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THEY EMPLOYED THEMSELVES AT ASHETON COURT.

And the young mother patiently abided at home, unconscious of the mourning of her little ones, and the unavailing cries with which they besought her presence. And yet, who dared to say she was unconscious? Why the quick tear, brushed away ere it could fall? Why the sudden flush, as if some inward thought had moved her spirit with a pang of anguish? Why those looks of pitiful yearning when she saw the cottage mothers play-

ing with their children in the summer gloaming? More happy was their lot than hers, though they toiled hard, had but scant fare, and a lack of worldly pelf, that brought with each day its dole of anxiety for the providing of the morrow. Yet were they happy; all they loved was within touch of their hand. And yet still happier, they could toil and work for them, taking as best wages their soft kisses—as full payment their growth and healthy habits.

But this period was not without its advantages to the character of Marion.

The simple trust, the strong faith, that had invested her with an idiosyncrasy of disposition unusual in one so young, was somewhat effaced in her intercourse with the Ashetons. The more especially as, acting according to the impulse of that nature, she had confidingly thrown every thought and feeling into the power of their will. Thus, wholly unknown to

herself, she was fast becoming one of themselves in all her deeds, if not so in her thoughts.

The last sacrifice having been completed, and her children removed from her care, it appeared as if, the pressure being withdrawn, her natural force of character recovered its tone; and once more having no other hope, she went to the Fountain of all hope and love with the simplicity and trust of her earliest years.

No overpowering fiat, no law of Medes and Persians, interfered to check the original bias of her heart. On the contrary, she now ruled absolute and alone. Mrs. Asheton found an indescribable comfort and peace in the freedom from certain rules and ceremonies that, enforced, so mar the common pleasure of everyday life. She began to discover that religion did not consist only in deeds, but was a portion of the heart, once penetrated, that opened out a spring of thoughts and feelings

that not only mixed itself with every other act of life, but could never again be closed.

In the old, this new-born feeling is accompanied by much humility and fear. In the young, we often see it offensive and blemished by the over-zeal that borders upon presumption. Mrs. Asheton, by degrees, gave herself up to this new delight, associating all the last words of her dear Mr. Asheton with those she now felt, and discovering daily new reasons for thinking as he had done. It was, therefore, natural that all other affairs should be left wholly in the hands of Marion, and that the young madam (as she was apt to be called, in contra-distinction to Madam Asheton) should now rule the kingdom deserted and despised by its legitimate sovereigns.

The care of Edward was an anxious one. The restoration to the simple habits and health of childhood appeared to Marion of more consequence than his education. But it required

months of never-ceasing vigilance to counteract the evils fostered in his early years.

He had one redeeming point, of which Marion never failed to take advantage, namely, the remembrance of his mother. The hope of seeing her again would influence him in his most wretched moods, though he could not be made to understand the meaning of Death.

At present, eighteen months having passed since her death, his general health was greatly improved. He was rosy and fat, enjoyed the simplest food, was very different in temper, and no longer fretful and wayward.

Undoubtedly, he loved his Aunt Marion, but the love was of a very exacting nature, taking her care as his right, her interest and attention as his own, with no other that had the privilege to share it.

Allowing for a certain period to elapse, during which the Ashetons might mourn as deeply as they wished for the deaths that had

occurred in the family, it began to be a matter of surprise to the surrounding neighbourhood, the length of time they employed in so doing.

The country being (as it often is) in that state of stagnation that any news is welcome, whether it hurts privately or shocks publicly, it began to be whispered about that strange things were going on at Asheton Court.

Mr. Asheton had not attended for a long time to his magisterial duties. Where was he? Gone away. But whither was he gone?—why was he gone?—who was gone with him? Rumour contradicted herself so flagrantly, that *No.* 1 and *No.* 2 young ladies, now transformed into amiable matrons, one as female assistant curate to a zealous rector, the other as wife of the banker at N——, fired with a noble energy to investigate the matter, again started on an errand of public inquiry. Not, however, for a gallop on the sands. Riches gave

a carriage to the one, and a desire always to be accompanied by a grave young curate in embryo, about four years old, the other, instigated them to use another mode of visiting this time. The banker's wife kept her carriage, the rector's wife did not. So *No.* 1 leant back in her own carriage, and patronised *No.* 2, to whom she had obligingly offered a seat, and they set off to the Woodhead. Mrs. Flower was now and then smitten with a love of gardening. When she gardened, it was no mere lady-like amusement. She dug, delved, planted, weeded, and watered, with as much zeal as if she was a day labourer working by the piece. Also she had a gardening dress. Even Prissy was disposed to be unkind in her remarks upon that dress, the principal feature of which was the bonnet. Intending to act as an effective screen against the sun's rude touch, it was tunnel-like in shape; at the end of it might be seen, with

the naked eye, a round, red humid face, all smiles and heat. It might shelter from the sun, but it had its inconveniences—the wearer was deaf from the time of putting it on, and painfully circumscribed as to vision. Thus, when Mrs. Flower became aware she was being touched to attract her attention (she was weeding the young carrots), she hastily brought to bear the focus of her bonnet upon the toucher, and was highly delighted to greet and welcome *No.* 1. Her voice came hollow and strange out of the tunnel, sounding the reverse of joyous; and a little shriek of surprise at discovering, with some trouble, another figure touching the horizon of her view, appeared to *No.* 2 to resemble a weak groan. However, there was no mistaking her pleasure.

She accompanied them into the house, divested herself of her bonnet, disclosing a knot of hair behind of two distinct colours, black and

white, knotted up, for convenience' sake, into a thing of shreds and ends; and having placed some musty biscuits and an old orange in front of the young embryo curate, for his private enjoyment, proceeded to unburden her mind of every idea there might be in it.

Yet *No.* 1 and *No.* 2 did not gain much information, beyond that Mr. Asheton and the children were gone, and the two Mrs. Ashetons left behind. The fact was, Mrs. Flower appeared to think it such a perfectly natural arrangement, and enlarged so much on the dear darling children absolutely being able to speak Italian as fluently as they did English, and gave such a delightful description of their dear mamma's delight in hearing such news of them, was altogether so happy, complacent, and voluble about the whole matter, they were reluctantly obliged to own to each other, when they got into their carriage, that they could make nothing of her.

No. 1. "But they have been gone a year—what an odd couple!"

No. 2. "Ridiculously odd. Fancy George leaving me for a year! I would soon know the reason why."

No. 1. "Frederick would not leave me for a week, I am certain. I have often urged him, and he has gone, intending to stay the week, but returned in two days—dear fellow."

No. 2. "You may be sure there is some other reason than educating the children. Now, if Priscilla had been there, instead of that ridiculous old woman—did you see her boots, they must have been her husband's (so they were, old Wellingtons)—we might have heard some good and sensible reason."

No. 1. "Suppose we go to Asheton Court, and see for ourselves."

No. 2. "Law! my dear, would you dare?"

No. 1. "Dare! Of course I dare. Why, are they better than me, I should like to know?"

No. 2. "Oh, of course not, my dear Julia; only, had I known you were going there, I would have put on my best bonnet."

No. 1. "They will guess, perhaps, that I picked you up walking, as they know you keep no carriage. Joseph, drive to Asheton Court."

No. 2. "Billy, you dirty boy, how dare you make such a mess of yourself with that orange?"

No. 1. "Oh, never mind that. He had better remain in the carriage, I think, if we are admitted."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH RUMOUR ONCE MORE BUSIES HERSELF ABOUT MARION, AND HAVING HAD TO ACKNOWLEDGE SHE IS NOT BLACK OUTWARDLY, THINKS IT NO HARM TO HINT SHE IS "DARK" WITHIN.

THEY were admitted, to the secret perturbation of both the ladies. She who came in her own carriage having, at the last moment, less assurance than she who was to be supposed to have been picked up.

Fortunately, they were ushered, by the joint efforts of one butler and two footmen, into no more formidable presence than Miss

Priscilla Flower's, who was innocently occupying herself with reading a newspaper, and swinging her foot, after that fashion yclept the devil's tattoo.

Reassured by the unconcerned air with which Prissy ordered that formidable person, Mr. Payne, the butler, to let his mistress know there were visitors, all their nervous tremors gave way to high satisfaction at the progress of their adventurous undertaking

No. 2 (hastening to take advantage of Prissy's lonely situation). "So you live here, Miss Flower."

Prissy. "No, I don't."

A pause.

No. 1. "We have been to the Woodhead to call upon your mother, and not finding you there, and she appearing occupied in gardening—"

Prissy. "Dear, dear, then what a figure she would be!"

No. 2. "An extraordinary bonnet, perhaps."

Prissy. "Yes; she made it herself, and—"

No. 1 (interrupting, fearing the time would slip). "How dull both the Mrs. Ashetons must feel, all alone."

Prissy. "Yes, very."

No. 2. "What could Mr. Asheton mean by going off in this extraordinary manner?"

Prissy. "But he did not; he went by the train."

No. 1. "She means leaving his wife and mother; that we think so odd."

Prissy. "Mrs. Asheton would not go; and Marion remained to take care of her."

No. 2. "But why did Mrs. Trevor not remain with her mother, and take care of her?"

Prissy. "Yes, indeed; why didn't she? I suppose she would not."

No. 1. "Mr. and Mrs. Asheton did not quite agree, did they?"

Prissy. "Quarrel, do you mean? As if any one could quarrel with May."

No. 2. "Of course not; but it appears so strange to all the country that he should leave her."

Prissy. "Well, and I quite agree with them all; it does look very strange."

No. 1. "Was there any reason for it, do you know? I mean any real cause for him to go."

Prissy. "Oh, yes; very good cause. He went because he would go."

Here the entrance of Mrs. Asheton, accompanied by Marion, put a stop to further picking of Prissy's brains, and the conversation took another form, in which the weather, the crops, and the road took the place of interest, instead of Mr. and Mrs. Asheton and their children.

"I am heartily glad we went," exclaimed *No.* 1, as she settled herself in her carriage.

"So am I. You may be sure there is something wrong, Priscilla was so very deep. And did you notice young Mrs. Asheton when I mentioned Billy's being left in the carriage?"

"Yes, she got scarlet; perhaps they have quarrelled about the children."

"I remember hearing she could hardly read or write. How absent she is; just as if she was thinking of anyone in the world rather than the person to whom she is speaking, and so gone off."

"She never can be plain, she is so elegant; but I have always noticed that quiet, elegant people have never anything in them."

"How very clear her eyes are! Have you never heard that that sort of eyes betokens bad temper or insanity?"

"No, never."

"Well, then, mark my words; some of these days we shall discover Mr. Asheton had very good reasons for carrying off his children. I always thought he married in too great a hurry."

"Poor thing! Well, she must always look pretty, and it will probably be a very mild fit, if she has what you prognosticate."

So the neighbourhood grew calm, waiting in patience for the grand catastrophe that it was bruited about would some day happen at Asheton Court.

Sir Robert Fane had had a jovial year. Everything prospered with him. Now that his luck was in, it would be folly not to take advantage thereof. He would run down to Asheton Court to see how they were all getting on, and, in the elation of his own spirits, he trusted to find Marion not unhappy. She was very good to his boy, and it behoved

him to be grateful. He would be glad to see she was not pining; it would give him a sort of confidence and hope that the ensuing year would be as fortunate as this. In fine, he was anxious to discover whether there was any chance of the return of Godfrey; if his very meritorious ideas regarding his children's education still remained paramount.

Sir Robert, flushed with prosperity, hardly knew what he thought, but that it would be "devilish hard" if he was not allowed the run of the Rollinston estates for a few years more; going on as successfully as this year, he might soon be able to buy back his patrimony, and then he would not care a toss-up for the Rollinston property.

Never was a more cruel case than his.

Is Sir Robert singular in this? I trow not; we have all our turns as we think.

Mrs. Asheton, for instance. Amid all her new feelings, nay, made stronger by their

strength, arose the pang that she was neglected by her own children; and when most in need of their presence, to bless and brighten her declining days, the further they had removed themselves from her.

She said little, but she pined over the thought in secret.

Sir Robert found her more altered than anyone at Asheton Court, unless it was his own boy, whom he did not know, with ruddy cheeks, short hair, and a schoolboy's jacket.

"Mrs. Asheton is very feeble, Priscilla," said he, one day, to his amiable *confidante.*

"Yes; May thinks some one ought to write to tell Mr. Asheton. She has said as much as she can in her letters, but, you know, he is such a ridiculous man, of course he thinks she is making the worst of it to get her children home."

"They have been gone more than a year now, does he not think of returning?"

"No, that he does not; and I'll tell you what it is, Sir Robert, he's afraid."

"Afraid!"

"Yes, that he is; he has had to take the children away to the sea-side, because they are pale, and he has had to write to Marion to send him directions about their clothes, and how the English nurses dressed and washed them, and all that; for the Italian ones, he allows, are very untidy, which you know means dirty. Think of the Asheton children not being clean and tidy. I'm so glad."

And Prissy looked very "vengeably" stern.

"You think, if he heard of his mother's failing strength, he would return?"

"He ought to. And as I don't wish to think any worse of him, I'll go as far as to say, of course he will."

"Do you think I had better write?"

"A very good idea—go and do it now."

"Or suppose I went to tell him?"

"Much better—pack up, and be off at once."

"No, that would be rash. I might alarm Mrs. Asheton, and put Marion into a flutter of expectation which might end in disappointment."

"To be sure, that's very true."

"I will remain the few days longer that I intended, and then go, as if it was all in the course of arranged events. Your sister is still in Rome?"

"Indeed, I don't know. Mrs. Trevor wrote that she hoped to persuade her to go to Sorrento with them. Have you heard about Julian?"

"No, do tell me."

"Such a fellow! Fancy his attacking Mr. Asheton, and wanting to fight him, and all that, only May does not know. Mrs. Asheton would not let her see Mrs. Trevor's letter. He ought to be put into a madhouse

again. It is a great pity he was ever let out."

"Does your sister mention anything about it?"

"No, only Mrs. Trevor, and it is ever since her letter that Mrs. Asheton has been fretting. She fancies he will kill Mr. Asheton, or something. But I don't care, as long as he does not hurt May."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OLD FRIEND TURNS UP.

Sir Robert felicitated himself upon his prudence and forethought.

"If I had gone to the Duke's now, instead of coming here, my friend Priscilla might have been moved to write to Asheton herself, and the first thing I should have heard about it would have been that they were here; and so lose all the advantages of this year. I think I must certainly go to Rome, now they are settled there again. Nothing like seeing for one's self. A little word here and there might help me to

another year's peace and comfort. That is, if I can do it without compromising myself. Of course, I must think of Marion, she has been very good to my boy. Halloo there, what can be in the bushes? Come out, will you?"

Sir Robert had been holding this interview with himself in a shrubbery adjacent to the walled garden, and startled by a rustling in the laurel fence that hid the brick walls from the flower-garden, he dashed into it, and succeeded in pulling out a young gentleman, handsome as Apollo.

"Count Julian!" exclaimed Sir Robert. "You here again!"

"Even so," responded the count in Italian. "I am here; I intend no harm. I came but to look at her."

"I thought you had been cured of attempting to thrust yourself in Mrs. Asheton's way, five or six years ago?"

"Ah, no, no, not twice those years. I have seen her—aha!—I looked—I have had that beatification." (At least it was thus Sir Robert translated his words in his own mind.)

"Are you aware that you are liable to be taken up for a trespasser, or perhaps shot for a poacher."

"I care not; Beatrice bid me come; she had reasons."

"The devil she had! Surely you don't think Mrs. Asheton will receive you, or speak to you, now her husband is absent."

"I know not, he is cruel, unkind, he leaves her, he takes her loves, her children; she will not like him much."

"Did Beatrice tell you all this?"

"Yes, and more; you have a new law, now it is passing your parliament. If he, if that man, that heart of stone man, leaves her two times, two years, she shall be free, she may be mine, she shall be mine, I have sworn it, I

swear it, when she Marion, la mia Mariana Flower."

Aghast at the rapidity with which Miss Flower had brought her little atom of thought (which had once come in contact with his) into bud, Sir Robert still felt there was some urgent necessity for her promptitude.

"Go," said he, "to the lower walk by the brook; I will come to you in an hour. We must not be seen talking together."

"Beatrice said, if I saw you, I was to bid you take heed."

Sir Robert spent this hour in a conflict; not exactly betting his right hand against his left, but certainly upholding his good and bad angels in equal measure.

"I must not be unfeeling to Marion, poor little thing; she will never have anything to say to this half-mad count, of that I am certain. She is not one of your flighty, revengeful women, who will enter into a flirtation, and dam-

age their character by way of a fine reprisal to a cool husband. She is safe, at all events, there. I'll uphold her myself, as long as I have a tongue that can speak. Her fair fame shall not be hurt; and I am much mistaken in the sagacity of Miss Beatrice if she does not think the same. I presume it is Asheton who is to be the scape-goat in this case; the safest plan will be for me to do as I had intended, go to Rome, only I will be off sooner. I cannot divine the young lady's tactics, but they are pretty bad ones, to judge by the beginning. Now, I don't intend to be drawn into anything dishonourable. Whatever her intentions may be, I shall confine myself to a little innocent plot for keeping Asheton abroad for another year or two. I owe it to Marion to take her part."

Oh, sad, sad was the air of the better angel, as she flew up at sunset to record the thoughts and deeds of Sir Robert Fane.

But he went to sleep in high content with himself. He had seen the count, comforted him, sent him off to a remote shooting-box belonging to a friend, announced his intention of going to Rome, had given orders for his departure, and left both the Mrs. Ashetons sitting up writing letters of which he was to be the envied postman. In his dreams, he was constantly haunted by a pale anxious face, looking at him with yearning eyes.

Indeed, matters were not comfortable in that beautiful and spacious palazzo.

The pretty, healthy, rosy children were pale, untidy, cross. Their nurses, unable to control that indomitable spirit appertaining to thorough-bred Britons, tried coaxing, bribery, and subterfuges with Mabel; they succeeded in buying good behaviour at the expense of her health, she being amenable to the charm of sugar plumbs.

Issa had her own way, coaxed or not, and

Rupert gloried in being naughty, frankly confessing his sins, as if they had been so many virtues. In no possible way could either of the elder children be induced to hide a fault committed by themselves or their attendants from their father. So Mr. Asheton began to imbibe a knowledge of human weaknesses, the existence of which he might have heard of, but never experienced, in his own home. And the knowledge did not add to his happiness.

Mrs. Trevor's advice was of no avail, for the children were as rude and disobedient to her as to their nurses; and she had private reasons of her own for avoiding, if possible, a war between her and her brother's children. She was more than suspicious that his heart began to fail him. She was painfully conscious that he longed for and lingered over Marion's letters with a degree of affection and interest he had not shown before, while he read

aloud with evident pleasure all those passages in his mother's letters that referred to her.

"Marion appears determined to keep pace with us, Ellinor," he remarked; "my mother says she can translate French and Italian with ease, though she can speak neither, from having no instructor."

"Which latter is necessary, the other almost useless, my dear brother."

"Not so, I fancy, Ellinor; at all events, it shows great application, besides a wish to gain general information. How pleasant it is to hear this account of Edward!"

And Mr. Asheton sighed.

"Ah, my dear Godfrey, would that I could believe all our dear mother says! She never saw a fault in those she loved."

"True. I think it would be well to select, among the number we know, a governess or tutor; I will write to Fane about it. Marion ought to be encouraged, and Edward would benefit also."

"Very kind; remarkably judicious in you, my dear Godfrey. By this means you will avoid any little unpleasantness when you return home. It would indeed be painful to you to have to introduce your talented and clever children to an ignorant mother."

"I have been glad to learn to-day that Rupert shows a disposition for painting; not that I wish him to become a proficient; he has other more important things to learn; but it is essential that he should know enough to be able to pass judgment, and that correctly, on every other painter. I enjoy a return to this beautiful terrace, Ellinor."

"Just what I said to Trevor; how charming it is to return home!"

"Home! Oh, no, not home; I cannot fancy any place home without my mother and my dear Marion. But I must leave you to write my letters. I should not like to lose a post in communicating with Fane."

"I trust his presence will do as well, my dear Asheton," said that worthy gentleman, who was at the moment being bowed on to the terrace, with all the best grimaces and gesture of the Majordomo.

They were highly delighted to see him, after the first shock. Why is it that the sudden appearance of one supposed to be far away should bring a rush of fear with it? Is it because we deserve sorrow more than joy? Each heart must answer for itself.

Never was anyone so welcome. Never had Sir Robert appeared so gay, so *debonnaire*. Exhilarating as his presence had always been at Asheton Court, at no time was it more appreciated than now, scarcely ever felt so opportune and happy.

Moreover, he gave by degrees so delightful an account of all at home, the health and happiness of Mrs. Asheton—"to be sure, she

was a little feeble, that must be expected,"—the beauty and goodness of Marion,—"certainly she was a little mopish now and then after the children, but she bore up capitally on the whole, and galloped all over the country with Edward.

"We hear he is wonderfully improved, Robert," said Mrs. Trevor, a slight touch of vinegar in her voice.

"Pretty well, pretty well," answered Sir Robert, who detected the vinegar; "Marion is so truly kind, takes such pains; but there was, I fear, so much room for improvement, that Edward appears to advantage from comparing the past with the present."

Mrs. Trevor cast a glance of triumph at her brother, which was lost upon him, but caught by Sir Robert.

"They lead such quiet, regular lives that really the time goes, according to their statement, on a double set of wings. Mrs. Asheton

told me, only the night before I left, it hardly appeared six months since you left."

(Oh, Sir Robert, why did you not mention the antithesis to this remark?)

"It has appeared very, very long to me," remarked Mr. Asheton.

"Ah, yes; doubtless you are not the careless fellow I am, Asheton; you live your daily troubles through. Now, I gallop over mine, and those I don't crush, I leave behind. How are all the young ones?"

A year had done much to obliterate the remembrance of their mother from the children's mental vision, though not from their hearts. They had seen so much, done so much, travelled backwards and forwards until one thing drove another from their remembrance, and they found the objects and duties of the day were about as much as they could retain.

Besides, Sir Robert Fane was not so well known to them as Miss Flower had been.

They were sent for; the Miss Trevors approached, faultless in deportment and dress, though not so in beauty or figure. They were, however, greatly improved, and but for a thin, faded look, promised to be pretty. They were tall, and very slim, approaching their teens. They had little falsetto voices, exactly the same, and reminded Sir Robert of machines wound up, and made to speak certain words, and no more. They paid their compliments to the stranger uncle after a law ruled and filed for them, and which that stranger uncle felt he was doomed to endure every morning and evening that he remained in Rome.

A noisy altercation heralded in Master Asheton. He was a noble boy. With his magnificent curls all in confusion, his dress all tumbled, his face stained, and his fingers inked, he was yet such a picture of boyish beauty, Sir Robert Fane could scarcely refrain from an open exclamation.

"You are my uncle," said the boy, marching straight up to Sir Robert, and looking into his face with the eyes and frank gaze most peculiarly his mother's.

"Rupert, you should not have appeared thus untidy," remarked his father.

"So Philippo said, papa; that was the noise you heard. Uncle, do you come from England?"

"Yes, straight from there."

"Did you ever see my mamma," and, like a cloud in a summer sky, came a dark trouble in those clear eyes.

"Yes, often; I have just left her."

"And why does she not come to see me?"

"Do you remember your grandmother?"

"An old lady with white hair, and eyes like hers."

And he glanced over his shoulder at Mrs. Trevor in a disdaining fashion that delighted Sir Robert.

"Well, she is very old, and must not be left alone; your mamma is so good, she takes care of her, while your father takes care of you."

Godfrey felt life itself would not suffice to repay to Sir Robert his debt of gratitude for a reply so judicious, so apt.

The boy's face beamed with pleasure, and the same dimples that rose and vanished in Marion's face played on his.

He took his uncle's hand in his, and kissed it, after the manner of foreign children, with a childish grace, saying, "Thank you, uncle. When you see my grandmamma again, tell her we spare mamma to her, but to no one else." Then turning to his father, he sprang into his arms, "Forgive me, papa; I will now go and make myself quite a gentleman, fit to hand in those great ladies, Isobel and Mabel," and he bounded from their presence on the instant.

"What a noble boy—how like his mother!" exclaimed Sir Robert.

"Too much so in some things, I fear," murmured Mrs. Trevor.

"He is somewhat wilful, no more," said Godfrey to Sir Robert, unheeding Mrs. Trevor; "but so intelligent, so sagacious, we spoil him rather. His tutors scarcely know how to restrain his energy; therefore we have not yet learnt the happy medium with him. But I can assure you he has an excellent disposition." It was clear to Sir Robert that Godfrey's heart was yet in the possession of this boy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LITTLE PARTICLES FLOATING ABOUT IN THREE SEPARATE BRAINS BEGIN TO MEET AND SHOW SIGNS OF LIFE.

WHILE waiting the coming of his children, Mr. Asheton broached his idea to Sir Robert of a tutor for his son, to whom, at the same time, he could intrust the improving of his wife's defective education.

Sir Robert was delighted with the plan, and entered into it with all the zeal Mr. Asheton could wish.

During their pacing to and fro on the

terrace, in the fulness of his present feelings, that were touched by the unexpected appearance of one whose opinion he valued, Mr. Asheton disclosed more of his secret thoughts to Sir Robert than he had ever done.

Again had that worthy individual reason to thank fortune for the good prompting that had sent him to Italy. Mr. Asheton was, in fact, upon the very verge of returning home.

"Of course, I consider," said he, "that their health is the most important thing to be regarded. Education, manners, accomplishments, everything, must give way to that; my kind sister did her best to point out to me that their pale cheeks did not proceed from the climate, but the rather because of their growth, instancing my young nieces, who are certainly less robust than I should like. I had arranged everything to return home this spring, but they recovered their bloom by the sea-side."

"I think it a pity you should give up so long-contemplated and excellent a scheme because your children have not such rosy cheeks as in England. I should try for another year, if I was you, but not remaining in one city. Stay three months at Naples, three at Florence, run up to Pau for the hot months; try that plan, ere you give all up."

"Your advice is good, certainly; but I begin to fear a father is useless in nursery matters. If Miss Flower was to leave us, as she may do at any moment, I hardly know what I should do. My boy is so wayward, he takes exception to his aunt's interference. She fears from jealousy, but the regard and value I have for her in no way resembles the love I have for my children. I cannot quite understand it."

"I trust to have a fortnight to spend with you; I will make it my business to think over the whole matter. As a disinterested

party (oh!), I may be better able to judge than you."

"Thank you very much. I shall esteem your doing so a great favour. Here are my daughters. You see, their brother is quite a little courtier in his way. He is wonderfully intelligent, and mimics everything he sees or hears."

Rupert, treading daintily, with an assumed air of great importance, led a sister in each hand up to Sir Robert, and made a great pretence of a formal introduction, a part that the young lady, Issa, performed with much gravity, while the infantine Mabel laughed, and showed as many dimples as her brother could do.

Sir Robert, rightly appreciating the manner of the Demoiselle Isabel, gravely bowed, and courteously kissed her little hand, a proceeding evidently much admired by the Master of the Ceremonies, Rupert. But when he would

have taken up Mabel in his arms, and kissed her as a loving uncle should, the dimples all disappeared. She shrieked with anger and fright, and would only be pacified in her father's arms. Wonderfully pretty, with a profusion of fairest hair, and singularly large, dark eyes; a mouth, that was the minute counterpart of Marion's—dewy and red as early strawberries.

Godfrey walked away, with his lovely plaything in his arms, to sooth and quiet her.

"Issa," said Rupert, "this uncle has seen our mamma lately. She is so kind; she is taking care of our grandmamma, who is very old."

"I wish to see my mamma myself," said Miss Issa.

"So you will some day," said Sir Robert.

"But, sir, when will that be?"

"Your grandmamma is old."

"Yes," interrupted Rupert; "but we ought

not to wish her dead that we may see our mamma; that would not be right. I will wait patiently. Tell my mamma I always see her in my heart."

"Do not be ridiculous, Rupert," interrupted Mrs. Trevor. "Send your love to your mother, and say you hope to be a good boy."

"But I do not hope it. I shall be good, if possible. If not, I shall be naughty."

"You are a very rude boy."

Unheeding Mrs. Trevor, beyond a little look of childish scorn that appeared inimitably diverting to Sir Robert, the boy turned to him.

"Uncle, tell me, do boys in England ride, and fish, and sport?"

"By sport I suppose you mean play, with fun—balls, bats, cricket."

"Oh, uncle!" clasping his hands with entreating looks—"do tell me about them all."

"You know your papa encourages no such follies," interposed Mrs. Trevor.

"Educate your pattern girls, and don't talk to me," said Master Rupert, mimicking her voice.

Sir Robert hardly knew whether to be amused, or to wonder at the sudden changes in his precocious nephew.

And was relieved when Mrs. Trevor angrily took her departure, followed by her daughters.

"I should wish to speak to you alone, Robert; I have much to say to you," she said, as she swept by.

"When he has told me all I wish, then you shall have him," said the saucy boy. Sir Robert could not help thinking that, unknown to himself, Rupert was revenging his mother after an effectual, somewhat irritating, fashion; he scarcely wondered at the father's infatuation, he was himself smitten with the boy, so

frankly naughty, so bewitchingly ingenious. In the course of that day, he had other confidences poured into his ear, besides those of Mr. Asheton and his son.

Mrs. Trevor, oppressed by fear, and the want of money, forgot that she ought to be clever, and devoid of all weaknesses.

On the contrary, she was really pitiful in her confidence, throwing herself unreservedly into Sir Robert's worldly-wise hands.

"It is perfectly clear, my dear Ellinor, that if Godfrey goes home now, you will be very awkwardly placed. Nearly the whole of Trevor's income, you say, is mortgaged for this building, and will be so for three years to come.

"Exactly so. Trevor is a perfect child in business; indeed, it is owing to me that we have anything left."

"And you wish me to use any influence I may have, in persuading Godfrey to remain

abroad that time. It will be very hard upon his wife."

"Far from it, Robert; she is not the sort of person to feel anything. It was such an unfortunate marriage. Look at that boy, a regular Flower, though, I must say, Beatrice is quite different. If Godfrey had only married her, she is so perfectly one with me in thought and opinion—"

"But perhaps not so with Godfrey, which is of more consequence. However, we have got a new law about to be enforced in England. Divorce will be easy, and separation a trifle."

"Pray, pray, Robert, be serious, and don't jest upon what can never occur."

"'Never' is a word I don't use. I have lived to see 'never' very often become a permanent 'ever.' Therefore I have exploded it from my dictionary."

"You do not feel for me, Robert."

"Upon my soul, I do, most deeply; though I am not in a condition to prove it openly."

Mrs. Trevor might have been comforted, had she known that he had very good reasons of his own for feeling strongly on the subject; but being unhappy herself, she was incapable of thinking that any other person was uncomfortable too. And he had no mind to return her confidence.

His private interview with Miss Flower was shorter, but more explicit.

"You sent your cousin over to Asheton, I presume, to create a little mischief."

Her eyes gleamed angrily.

"If you wish me to help you, you must confide in me wholly. Have you any reason to suppose that Marion, disgusted at her husband's conduct, will, by way of revenge, flirt a bit with the count?"

"No! But people talk, and the report will

be enough for Mr Asheton, after his sudden visit before."

"Oh ho; that's your plan, is it? Well, he has been advising me to get a tutor for my boy, and Marion is to participate in the advantage. Do you think Julian's wits sufficiently steady to take the place under a disguise?"

"He will do anything to be near Marion."

"I must think about it a little, Miss Flower, ere I consent."

She did not seem unhappy at this hesitation.

CHAPTER XX.

PRISSY BECOMES MOROSE.

PERHAPS Miss Flower knew from experience "that he or she who deliberates is lost." For though she had no further communication with Sir Robert, she appeared easy regarding his decision. Not so Mrs. Trevor. The more secret interviews she had, so many the more did she require, until Sir Robert was as well acquainted with all that was passing in her heart, and through her brain, as herself. Indeed much more so, as she would have re-

pudiated a good many of them, had she seen them written down.

Sometimes your sagacious people let out ideas of a very sorry nature, which less wiser folks are without the brains to conceive, and may therefore hug themselves with self-complacency, if they have the wit to do it.

"My dear Ellinor, pray allow me to suggest, a slight deficiency in principle runs through your remarks. I don't pretend to much morality myself, but I must decline recommending a married man to look and judge for himself that he has wedded the wrong woman."

"My dear Robert, pray be serious. I confide in you, as one who thoroughly understands what Ashetons are, and what they require."

"That may be; but what motive can I give as a palliative for telling Asheton he ought to have married Beatrice, more especially when

I don't hesitate to confess I like Marion better."

"I see you do, like every one else; but, I thank God, Trevor and myself retain the use of our senses, and are not fooled by a pretty face and specious manner."

"I rather like being fooled. But take my advice, and worry yourself no more about a matter you cannot undo. Anyone overhearing us might reasonably take us for backbiters, slanderers, not to say murderers—for did I not hear you lamenting just now that she was so healthy."

"Pray mention her name no more. I am sick of her. Has my brother confided anything more to you of his intentions?"

"I think you may reckon upon another year with safety, but, beyond that, I would not undertake to answer for a minute. He is beginning to think a little about his wife, for once in his life. 'Absence makes the

heart grow fonder,' we have heard. And but that he is rather ashamed to take his children home considerably the worse in manners (that young Rupert swears in *patois* like a native), whatever they may be in languages, he would, I think, go at once. Now he intends trying this plan of so many months' residence in some of the great cities. He will be more amused himself that way, for the moment he is moped, you will see, he is home-sick also. Let the children have again a good English nurse to keep them clean, which it strikes me they are not now. Besides, they will pay more attention to her than to these gesticulating foreigners, for they seem English in every idea."

"So you see that, do you? As I tell Godfrey, it is peculiarly unfortunate that they should have inherited such determined John Bull notions from their mother. Look at my girls."

"If I was Asheton myself, I should be very proud of my children. I would bring up my boy a thorough Englishman. What a sportsman he would—but I beg your pardon, I am talking treason to you. Get all your letters ready, for I am off to-morrow. I have heard of a tutor, and as he is now in England, there is nothing to detain me."

"My dear Fane," said Godfrey to him that night ere they retired, "there is one little circumstance I wish to mention to you; in fact, it is owing to it that I rather thought it better to go home. That young Count di Ramiano is out again—I mean no longer under surveillance. He made a sort of —a kind of absurd attack upon me, which I grieve to say caused a report, in which Marion's name was unfortunately mixed. Miss Flower did all she could to prevent it. It annoyed me extremely. I have not seen him about lately; indeed, I heard casually that

he was gone to England. If, in his madness, he should go into ——shire, or approach Asheton Court, or, in fact, make any attempt to see Marion, I rely upon your instant information. You remember she fainted, though I believe not on his account—at least she said so. Spare no expense, not only in sending to me, but in expediting my return, by ordering relays of horses, or coming to take charge of my children. If, through my absence, my —my apparent neglect of her, reports should arise, similar to those spread in Rome, I need not tell you, my dear Fane, all happiness would be over for me. I would never see Asheton Court again. My mother alone knows all I wish upon this very delicate subject, as she was my counsellor before. I have no other on whom to rely but yourself."

"Did ever man have his own fortune thrown into his hands as I have?" thought

Sir Robert, as he journeyed home, and reconsidered all that had past. "Or did ever any man throw away his, as poor Asheton might do if it were not for me, for I must be true to Marion, poor little thing; I only want this year, and then I'll back her up through thick and thin, among the whole lot. I'll stake all I have on her. I am rather sorry I wrote to M. Schmid (*alias* the count) about his duties as tutor; I suppose I must let him go for a month or two, as I have raised his hopes. Besides, they will think it very odd at the Court, his non-appearance—having been advertised that he was already in England. Perhaps he won't take kindly to an elderly disguise, or keep himself within bounds. If so, I am well out of any more trouble about him, I shall pack him off back again to his own folks. I will remain just one full day at Asheton Court to tell them all the news, and then I will be off to the count, and give

him a week's training in his new harness before I let him go without a bearing rein."

It was with very mixed feelings that he was welcomed at the Court.

Neither Mrs. Asheton nor Marion had been able to refrain from indulging in the hope that the kind, warm-hearted Sir Robert Fane would have so worked upon his brother-in-law as perhaps to bring him home with him, or, at all events, to fix a time for his certain return.

Prissy, who couldn't keep a secret but upon the most solemn terms, had let out all about her conversation with Sir Robert, and how he had gone on purpose to tell Mr. Asheton that his mother had become weak and feeble, only longing to see him ere she died.

A hope that his return was inevitable had brightened Marion's eyes and cheeks, while old Mrs. Asheton went further and ordered a great airing of beds, a preparing of good things, and a general sort of brushing up of

every corner. The little that Sir Robert had to say on a subject which engrossed them wholly, fell with a leaden weight upon Marion's heart, with a cruel blow upon Mrs. Asheton.

His reluctance to say anything, his avoidance of the subject, impressed them both with the same idea, that Godfrey had been urged to return, and regarded not the entreaty.

"My daughter, did my daughter know I wished to see her?" murmured Mrs. Asheton, as the tears of bitter disappointment fell involuntarily from her eyes.

"Pray don't speak to me of Mrs. Trevor," exclaimed Sir Robert, angrily, for in this sensation he felt he might indulge, without detriment to the truth; "I have no patience with her. There is some reason in Godfrey's whims about his children, for I never saw such beautiful, intelligent creatures, but for Mrs. Trevor there is no excuse; pray mention her name no more—it irritates me."

Notwithstanding that this burst of indignation saved him further interrogation, Sir Robert was very uneasy. Marion's face cut him to the heart, and Mrs. Asheton's trembling, agitated disappointment gave him terrible qualms.

"I cannot stay here, Priscilla, any longer, seeing so many miserable faces."

"Well, there is no one to stop you going," answered Prissy, sharply. When Prissy was unhappy, she was generally cross.

"Who was that personage, for I hardly know what to call her, that you were ushering out of the room when I entered some time ago?"

"She is some Lady Superior of some place, and I don't think her a lady, and I am sure she is not at all superior."

"But what is she doing here? How came she on visiting terms at the Court?"

That's best known to herself. She called

on her own account, and brought a tract upon 'Death' with her, and bid May give it to Mrs. Asheton, who, she said, she heard was near her end."

"And what did May answer?"

"Why, she told her she hoped Mrs. Asheton would be spared to her for some time yet; and as she was always speaking of and preparing for her death, there was no need of the tract."

"Monstrous impertinent!"

"So I thought; but mamma thinks it very kind of her, and she goes in and out of the Woodhead almost as often as the cat. And she wanted me to become a sister. But I said I would not; I have no sisterly feeling for the Lady Superior, and what's more, I don't want to. So, there, that's all I have to say."

CHAPTER XXI.

MURDER IS COMMITTED.

Mrs. Asheton failed rapidly. Marion, desirous that her husband should have no cause to think she worried him for her own ends, wrote privately to Mrs. Trevor and Beatrice, both of whom had reasons of their own for taking no notice of the letters.

The new tutor had arrived some time, but, according to orders from Marion, he was not domiciled at the Court. He came every day to the Gothic summer-house, where the fair

Diana was still on the verge of hunting, and gave Edward his lesson. "For myself," she wrote to Sir Robert, in explanation of these arrangements, "I have not the time to spare from my mother to take any advantage from Edward's tutor; neither can I have her quiet and domestic privacy intruded upon by the presence of a stranger."

"Tumtity-ti; here's a spirit, who would have thought it? I admire her all the more for it. Now I need trouble myself no more about the count, she will be a match for him."

Thus thought Sir Robert Fane, and went off to Chester races in high spirits.

But he was not fortunate there, so he returned to his own house rather low. He thought it as well just to look over his affairs, and see how he was getting on in the desirable object of reclaiming his paternal property. Things did not look so flourishing as he had expected; allowing two full years to elapse of certain

possession of the Rollinston property, he must yet depend a good deal upon a few strokes of luck.

"Let me have but one or two lucky goes, and then I'll set about getting Asheton home, and making that dear little Marion happy once more. I am convinced I owed all my ill luck at Chester to the remembrance of her poor wistful face. I saw it above the head of every horse, it was peeping at me out of every crowd, and if I looked up into the air, there were those two melancholy eyes gazing full at me. I wonder how the count gets on; what a devil of a row there would be if Asheton was to discover his doings!"

Sir Robert might have had a great deal more to think about, but he was interrupted by a commotion at the front door. Ere he had time to rise from his chair, in rushed the count, with the clothes and habits of a venerable tutor, but without the wig, spectacles, or

paint, or whatever he had to disguise him.

The count's story was very short. After having waited with more patience than Job ever thought of exercising, much less was capable of performing, after unwearied submission to his hateful task, after troubles, annoyances, disappointments, agonies, he had succeeded in obtaining one interview with "Marion;" and in that interview, before he had uttered two words, she recognised and dismissed him; dismissed him with a dignified indifference that was harder to bear than astonished anger.

"Shall I hate her? Oh, I will, I must—I will sacrifice her, and assassinate myself."

That was the real summing up of a two hours' rhapsody, during which Sir Robert had serious thoughts of sending for a keeper to carry him off to a lunatic asylum.

"Be calm, my dear count, pray be less violent."

"Did she say she would write to Mr. Asheton?"

"No, no; she say nothing but 'go, go; nothing but you being foreigner prevents me from sending for the police.' Oh, how I hate her! Ah! Mariana mia." The count passed from the angry to the pathetic mood, in less time than Sir Robert could draw a breath.

"Did she say she would write to me?"

"No, no; but the police, oh! those police; I would have assassinated the police."

"Come, come, no more of that. I shall have a letter from her to-morrow, perhaps."

"Ah! a letter about me, a letter. Shall I see it? Oh, Signor Roberto, I will see that letter."

So you shall, and you may keep it also. And now, pray go to bed; time will pass quicker in sleep than in any other way."

Sir Robert, to use his own phrase, was in a deuce of a mess. He heartily wished he had

had nothing to do with the count. A very bad book he had made in this business, and what was worse, there was no likelihood of his being able to hedge his bets. He trembled for the post. But he was perplexed, and the count in despair—there was no letter from Marion.

"I shall wait a week or two," said Sir Robert, "and then if I don't hear, I shall run down, and see whether she suspects me or not. Meantime, if I was you, I would return to Italy."

Sullen and angry, the count made no reply, but, to Sir Robert's infinite relief, he took his departure that evening. He vouchsafed no information as to his intentions, but as long as he got rid of him, Sir Robert was not curious to know.

But as days went on, he felt rather ashamed of meeting those clear eyes, and he wrote, in-

stead, the usual sort of letters, as if all was as he had left it.

He would liked to have written to his *confidante*, Prissy, inquiring particulars from her, but he knew she was eccentric about her letters. For instance, if the post came at an inopportune moment, such as when she was in the middle of hemming a frill, or knitting a stocking—the letters might have contained news of a most startling character, even that the comet had already touched the earth, and it was beginning to blaze away not far off—not one word would Prissy read until the hem was finished, or the round of the stocking knitted to the proper point. But she compromised herself in this way:—she would beg anyone to open her letters, and read aloud what there was important. Therefore, if Sir Robert's confidential letter should arrive at one of those important periods, there was no knowing who might open it. Time passed on, and he was

almost oblivious of the matter, when he received a letter from Prissy herself, short and characteristic :—

"Dear Sir Robert,

"If I was you, I would come here and see how ill Mrs. Asheton is, and then I would go and bring Mr. Asheton home, whether he would or no. May does not know I am writing, therefore you need not tell her; and I don't want an answer, because the only one necessary is that you come.

"I remain, yours, &c.,

"Priscilla Flower."

He went. When he arrived at Asheton Court, it was one of those lovely August days in which everything is tinged with the warm hues of a ripe summer. A universal stillness of the air, the absence of song among the birds, or humming from insects, gave the idea

that nature, having fulfilled her summer work, was resting. The heat was great, but not unpleasant, enjoining relaxation, but not lethargy. For the sky was too blue, the air too clear, and the whole scene too exquisite to be forgotten for a moment, To a poet it might have appeared that nature paused in her daily work, to contemplate the loveliness of her handiwork, and, in pausing, grew too enamoured of it to pursue her labours. Sir Robert was not indifferent to the beauty of the weather.

"What a glorious day for the Derby this would be. One could see miles without one's glass."

"The ladies were out in the garden," Mr. Payne informed him. "A very great change in Madam Asheton; surprising Mr. Asheton did not return. The young madam was looking extremely pale and anxious. Madam Asheton was perhaps a trifle better, out to-day

for the first time for six weeks. Master Fane excellently well—charming young gentleman, so amiable to his grandmamma and aunt." This was Mr Payne's running commentary to Sir Robert, as he divested him of his travelling costume.

When he had shaken off the dust, and he was ready to go and see them, Sir Robert hazarded this question :—

"What about my boy's tutor? He went off, did he not, Payne?"

"I believe so, sir; I was not informed of any reason."

Satisfied that all was pretty safe, and that Marion had thought no more of the matter, Sir Robert, having declined Payne's further escort, went to seek for the ladies; he thought he heard voices in the rose garden, and was bending his steps there, with the leisurely air of your man of the world, who is never seen in a hurry or perturbation, even if the pole of

an omnibus is touching his back, when a succession of shrill screams thrilled through the still air, shooting right into his ear. One bound, and he was in the midst of a strange group: Mrs. Asheton apparently dead in her chair, Marion hanging over her, unheeding the count, on his knees before her, clasping her dress, while Prissy was tugging at his coat with all her best energies, and uttering at the same time, with equal vigour, those startling shrieks.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH SIR ROBERT FANE TAKES A LONG JOURNEY AGAINST HIS WISHES.

It took Sir Robert but a moment to free Marion from the count's grasp, which done, Prissy hung tightly on to him, shrieking louder than ever; nor did she cease until, a crowd of servants having run from all quarters, she was enabled to see Julian in the safe custody of half a dozen of them.

Meantime, in obedience to Marion's low cries, "Oh, my mother—carry in my mother," Sir

Robert had lifted Mrs. Asheton's lifeless form from the chair, and borne her into the house.

Even as he did it, Marion had given the several orders that were necessary for snch an emergency; and by the time Mrs. Asheton was laid on her bed, the doctor had been sent for, and the remedies in the house ready.

Unable to do more, Sir Robert left Marion carrying them into effect, and joined Prissy, who was sobbing and scolding with equal vehemence.

"Oh, Sir Robert, he has killed her, that fellow—and what's to become of us all.

As for getting anything like a coherent story from Prissy, it was impossible, beyond the fact of Mrs. Asheton and May having been together in the garden; Stephenson and Prissy had left them, the one to gather lavender, and the other to seek for a ripe peach, and Prissy supposed that the count took advantage of their absence

to intrude upon the other two. Mrs. Asheton could not be left for a moment, so he might have been "frightening them to death" the whole time she was away, quite a quarter of an hour. She heard voices, rather excited and unusual, and could not think what it meant. Then, when she turned in through the gate-way—

"Oh! Sir Robert, I thought I should have died; he had got hold of Marion, that fellow; but how she spurned him, and then poor Mrs. Asheton gave that terrible cry, and May ran to her, and I caught hold of that fellow, and I think I screamed, but I can't be certain; however, I know he should have pulled my arms off before he got away."

When the doctor arrived, he gave no hope of Mrs. Asheton surviving the night; at the same time informing Sir Robert that her state of health had been such for some time, that he had been fearing an attack of paralysis; nothing but young Mrs. Asheton's extreme care

had warded it off so long. A sudden shock, such as Mrs. Asheton appeared to have received from the unexpected appearance of some madman, would fully account for the fit. It would be useless for Sir Robert to set off in search of Mr. Asheton; it was utterly impossible that he could arrive in time to see Mrs. Asheton alive. He had much better wait, and be of service to the young lady, who would require it ere morning. Meantime, as he could for the present be of no further use upstairs, he had better carry off the person who had caused this terrible catastrophe, and place him in safe custody.

All this being done, Prissy and Sir Robert were left to get through the rest of this melancholy evening, as best they could.

Prissy found great comfort in talking, but her words fell on heedless ears. Sir Robert was wholly occupied in thinking what would become of him now. Dr. Ford returned about

eleven, and they all three kept a melancholy vigil together, during which Sir Robert had to listen to his companion's strictures upon the culpable undutifulness of Mr. Asheton and Mrs. Trevor.

At three o'clock, at that moment when the dawn begins with calm, but mighty, power to bid dark night retire, withdrawing from the world the veil of sleep, and waking it to light, to life, to work, they were sent for to the chamber of death. How often does it happen that this hour brings to the wearied soul that everlasting dawn of which it is the type.

They drew near with solemn awe. On the pillow, by the dying woman, sat her devoted companion and daughter. In the same dress she wore in the garden, with the little lace 'kerchief yet round her throat, her fair redundant hair gathered up, with all its rich luxuriance of curls, in a cluster behind her ears, the pure and faultless profile looking in the dim

light, with the shadows from the thick crimson curtains, as if cut out from the polished rosied cameo shell—the spectators might well think that the departing soul was sustained and comforted by the bodily presence of one already in the exalted position of a saint in heaven. As the first ray of the sun entered the chamber, the soul of Mr. Asheton departed.

"She is released," said Marion. Tenderly she kissed the dead face, and closed the dimmed eyes. Then with a deep sigh, as if in that she breathed forth the pang that no more could she do, she turned to Sir Robert—

"You will go, perhaps, and seek Mr. Asheton; he will have sufficient to regret in not being here to perform this last duty, that I have now done, without the additional grief that he cannot place his mother by the side of our father."

"Where is he?" asked Sir Robert.

"We know not; otherwise I would have asked you to telegraph. They were about to leave Florence, but had not decided where to go."

She passed on, motioning all to follow, leaving the dead alone with her faithful servant and the housekeeper.

Though bewildered by the sudden crash that appeared to have fallen upon all his schemes, and the utter change that must now immediately take place, he did not dare to gainsay her one word, or to detain her for further debate. There appeared to him nothing left to do, but to obey her.

Sending for Mr. Hearn, the agent, he begged him to make ready every arrangement for the funeral, on the same scale that had been thought necessary for the daughter and husband gone before. Anything requiring further consideration he was to refer to Mr. Flower or Doctor Ford; and, leaving messages

with Priscilla for Marion, whom he did not again see, he departed on his painful errand.

Worse than painful. He was going to his own destruction, speaking mildly, and it was necessary to go headlong to it, if he meant to bring Mr. Asheton back in time for his mother's funeral.

Once or twice he had serious thoughts of what he termed "bolting." A man was justified in thinking of himself before any one else; he ought, if he did rightly by himself, to go home, sell off his horses, reduce his establishment, and put everything entirely on the strictest routine regarding economy. One thing alone deterred him. He knew there were two other people as desirous as himself to prevent Godfrey's return home.

"Women stick at nothing," thought he; "when they want their own way, they may hit upon some plan. Far be it from me to advise anything injurious to Marion (really

she is too good for this world — what a heavenly creature she looked!); but still I may be ten days or a fortnight finding Asheton, and, of course, the funeral may be over. (I fixed this day fortnight as the latest day for it, with Hearn.) He may be disgusted—he was fond of his mother. However, the chances are so bad, the maddest fool would not take the heaviest odds in my favour. No, the first stoppage I have, I'll write off home, desire everything to be sold, and apply for the consulship. Marion ought to be considered now; and if I think of her as happy, why, perhaps I may not be so wretched out there, after all. But he does not deserve her; it would serve him right—no, that would punish her more than himself. He is a stone, a stock. I wonder what the count said or did to shock poor Mrs. Asheton into her grave. Some plot hatched by that—she's a woman, and I hold it wrong to call

them ill-names, but that Beatrice put him up to this outrage, I'll bet two to one in hundreds."

But if we are to follow the course of Sir Robert's thoughts all through the journey, endless would be the task. The pith of them was contained in the above, beginning, continuing, and ending it. But it augured well for poor Marion, that the natural hilarity of his disposition failed him, and so far from rising superior to Fate, as heretofore, the nearer he approached the goal of it, the more depressed was he.

He was, however, faithful to her in one thing (though perhaps speeded by a nervous design to know his own fate), and that was, he lost no time on the road. In something less than five days he reached Florence, only to find they had gone to Nice. He rested twelve hours on the strength of Mr. Asheton's being so much of the way towards home, and arrived at Nice

in time to learn that they had left it to go to Monaco, as being cooler and more private for the children's bathing, and the enjoyment of the sea breezes. The lack of accommodation, such as they had considered necessary, besides discovering that Monaco was hotter than Nice, owing to its rocky, shadeless situation, had driven them from there, only two days before. Tracing them from place to place, Sir Robert came up to them at Pau, on the very day appointed for Mrs. Asheton's funeral.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH MORE MURDER IS ATTEMPTED.

As Sir Robert drove up to the hotel, Mr. Asheton's servants were removing the luggage from his travelling carriages.

Standing by one of them, in company with some of the maids, as having none among them whose duty it was to collect her packages, and being therefore necessitated to look after them herself, stood Miss Flower. She left them all to their fate, as she recognised Sir Robert Fane.

"You are the bearer of some bad news," she whispered.

"Mrs. Asheton is dead, killed suddenly by some communication made by your cousin Julian."

In spite of every effort, Miss Flower could not conceal a strong emotion showing itself on her countenance.

Whether of joy, grief, or surprise, Sir Robert was unable to determine. Handsome as she was, she reminded him of a cat playing with a mouse. "Come, come at once to Mrs. Trevor, you must break it to her first." And she led him swiftly by the hand upstairs. She paused in the anteroom, for she heard Mr. Asheton's voice speaking to her sister.

"I have to apologise, Ellinor, for Rupert's ill-behaviour; yet I know not how to punish him. He spoke the strict truth, and I fear either Emma or Etta have not done so."

"Had he been any other than your child,

Godfrey, I never could have forgiven him; let the matter rest now; I consent to our having separate houses; and while I take care to superintend everything at yours, for your comfort, the children can be kept perfectly apart from my daughters."

"So be it," said Mr. Asheton. "I have left them, likely to be very comfortably settled in a short time, next door. The courier having made the arrangement, according to my wishes, as you know. Therefore we found everything ready. You will stay here, I suppose."

"I suppose so. Trevor has gone to make arrangements."

"Then farewell for the present."

In vain Beatrice tried to escape with Sir Robert, Mr. Asheton had confronted them ere they could turn.

"Marion?—my mother?" exclaimed Godfrey.

Sir Robert felt the room turning round; all

that he had intended to say, all his self-possession, almost the power of speech, left him.

Dragging him into the room where Mrs. Trevor was alone, Mr. Asheton, with the white face of strong anguish, besought him to speak.

Miss Flower locked the door, and stood by it, as if to keep aloof—yet guard intrusion during a grave and solemn moment.

"Marion, Marion?" asked Godfrey, with troubled vehemence.

"Well, well—quite well," gasped Sir Robert.

"My mother?" slower, more sadly was the question asked.

"Not so well, not well, very ill."

"It is on her account you seek me?"

"Yes, 'tis on her account, solely on her account."

"Miss Flower, might I trouble you?" said Godfrey in his stately manner. "I would pass

out—my servants must not unpack. I start for England in an hour."

"You have not heard all," said Beatrice, in a low, compassionate voice.

"Is my mother dangerously ill, Robert?" demanded Mrs. Trevor, who had hitherto been wrapped up in a private grievance of her own. Miss Flower's significant glance was not lost upon her. Then, as if recalling the letters she had received, of which Mr. Asheton knew nothing. "She is dead. Oh; heavens! is my mother really gone?"

"She is, indeed," answered Sir Robert, feeling it best to come out with the worst.

Godfrey sunk into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"It was very sudden, in the garden. I travelled night and day, but could not come up with you sooner. I did my best. I arranged the funeral was to be delayed a fortnight. 'Tis a fortnight to-day."

"What! shall I not be in time to see my mother again? Oh, Fane, was this well done of you? Where was Marion that she did not write—that she did not warn me? Oh, my mother, my mother, more than ever do I feel how wrong I was to leave you."

Bewildered by this unwonted burst of feeling, Sir Robert could only stammer out:—

"She died in the garden; she had a shock; it was a fit; we knew nothing."

"A fit!" exclaimed Mrs. Trevor, "a shock; surely Marion neglected no duty? If it is owing to her mismanagement, I shall never forgive myself."

"No, no, no," interrupted Sir Robert, "a thousand times no; it was a madman, some insane person attacked Marion—"

"My cousin, Julian Ramiano," said Miss Flower, calmly.

Mr. Asheton sprung to his feet, and planting himself in front of Sir Robert, essayed to

speak. Shocked at the agony expressed in his face, Sir Robert became more and more confused.

"Yes, why, yes; I suppose it was so. I don't know what he did, I wasn't there; he is taken away now. Dr. Ford has got him in charge. If there had been any fear for Marion, I never would have left her."

"Julian has been in England eight months," said Miss Flower.

"And where?" It might have been Mr. Asheton who asked, but the voice was strangely unlike his.

"Ah, about there, somewhere; Marion knew it. I have all the letters; he was disguised."

"The devil is in this woman," thought Sir Robert. "I must to Marion's rescue."

"Marion did not know that, Miss Flower; she saw him but once in the garden, and he was not disguised then."

"I beg your pardon. Much as I should

like to believe it, he could not have been your boy's tutor for three or four months, and she not know it."

"I am aware of that disgraceful transaction, but out of tenderness to my brother, I have said nothing." (Oh, Mrs. Trevor, why not add, you learnt it from Marion herself, who entreated you to inform Godfrey, only not telling him herself, lest he should think it a device to ensure his return home? It is dangerous to be too high-minded with the unscrupulous.)

Only to the Searcher of all Hearts, could it be known what passed through Godfrey Asheton's heart during this conversation. With a mighty effort, he kept down all outward show, but there was a plaintive sound, like the voice of a woman, as he said:—

"You promised me—you promised me, Fane."

"Well, so I did, my dear fellow. My dear Godfrey, I did my best, and so did Marion.

Upon my soul, everything was done that could be done, but really you are yourself to blame; you left her, you know, her children taken away, and all that—"

"Sir, who blamed my wife?" with a burst of passion. Godfrey appeared about to spring upon Sir Robert.

"Godfrey, brother, remember your sister, your Ellinor. We two are alone left now," and Mrs. Trevor threw her arms round him.

"I do not understand you."

Mr. Asheton rather muttered these words than said them, while the crimson colour left his face suddenly, and, alarmed at the ashy paleness that succeeded, Sir Robert forced him into a chair.

"You must, you shall understand me; your Ellinor, your own trusted sister. Our mother's death is not the least we have to suffer."

"The devil is in both these women," again

thought Sir Robert, "and has full possession of them. Be a man, Fane, and speak the truth" Aloud: "Ellinor, do not mislead Godfrey. His mother's death was caused by some words or some threats that madman used, but no blame, nothing, can be attached to Marion."

"Pardon me, you know nothing, Robert. I have heard from many other sources sufficient to erase from my heart anything like affection for her you name. And now my mother's unhappy, untimely death bids me, as a sacred duty, spurn her for ever as a sister. The time is not yet come for me to confide to my brother all I could say. But henceforward I devote myself to him only. No one can blame you for taking her part. We have always been aware of her power over you. Leave us, leave my brother and myself alone, to weep together; we have indeed much over which to mourn, but still we have each other and our children."

Mr. Asheton's head had gradually drooped as his sister spoke. She paused for him to reply.

Struck with his attitude, so motionless, so dejected, Sir Robert took hold of the hand that had been nervously twitching the arm of the chair but a moment before. As he did, Mr. Asheton uttered a loud, strange cry, and fell in strong convulsions upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SOUL OF SIR ROBERT IS FOUGHT FOR.

It was late at night, on the ensuing evening, that Sir Robert, Mrs. Trevor, and Miss Flower sat together. Mr. Asheton, having been copiously bled, and carefully attended to by an eminent physician, was pronounced out of all danger, but the only words he had spoken were to order his servants to convey him into the same house his children inhabited, and once there, he had locked himself up in his apartment, not even admitting his sister Ellinor. The physician had been with him

twice, and he had just brought Mrs. Trevor the last report, which was so favourable, Mr. Asheton had dismissed him from further attendance.

Mrs. Trevor. "Then to-morrow I hope to open to my brother our plans for the future."

Sir Robert. "And what are those plans?"

Mrs. Trevor. "Of course he will not now return to England. We shall take up our permanent abode in one of the great capitals of Europe. The name of Asheton, sullied and breathed upon, is enough of itself to forbid our returning to our first home, even if other very important questions did not render it advisable.

Sir Robert. And pray, who has sullied the name of Asheton?"

Mrs. Trevor. "Don't argue—don't fly into a rage. I am calm, I mean to be calm, I shall mention no names."

Sir Robert. "Listen to me you shall. In

endeavouring to blacken Marion's fair name, and separate her from her husband, you do it to serve your own purposes. You wish to keep your brother to yourself. Accomplish your wish in any way you choose, but you shall not do it at her expense. I am as interested as you are to keep them apart, but hang me if I am villain enough to do it after this fashion, especially now that I know he really regards her."

Miss Flower. "Mr. Asheton suffers because of the disgrace—his wife holds the same place she always did; she is the mother of his children."

Sir Robert. "Miss Flower, that poor girl, that tender mother, endures wrongs in a thousand ways, of which we are not only unconscious, but incapable of realizing, by nature. Do her justice, and I'll lend my help to keep Asheton still abroad. Breathe a word against her, and I am your instant enemy."

A sort of scorn came into Miss Flower's handsome but evil face, as she was about to reply. Mr. Asheton's courier was heard demanding admittance at the door. He brought a letter for Sir Robert Fane, with a message that he was to wait for the answer.

Mrs. Trevor looked strongly inclined to snatch at the letter and open it. Sir Robert felt his hand tremble as he held it. Miss Flower alone had sufficient presence of mind to bid the man wait below. Sir Robert's hand shook with very good reason, while his heart beat painfully. Strange whisperings were in his ears. Had he time to define them, he might have recognised the struggle between his good and bad angels; he might have felt the promptings of conscience bearing down the suggestion of evil. He knew, he was convinced, that letter held his fate, and that fate was in his own hands.

He paused. He endeavoured to recall

Marion to his mental vision; he tried to strengthen his mind by remembering her care and love for his boy. He called himself to himself a fool, a blockhead, and many more names, but nothing would do. In obedience to Mrs. Trevor's repeated wishes, he opened the letter and read it with a sinking heart. It verified his fears, he had not dreaded its contents an atom too much: —

"Tell me, Fane, in one word, can I go home or not? I wait your answer to give my orders.

"GODFREY ASHETON."

"There, I told you so. I knew how it would be. My brother will be on his way to England to-morrow, and what will become of us?" said Mrs. Trevor.

"Sir Robert has the decision entirely in his own hands," remarked Miss Flower, reading the letter after Mrs. Trevor.

"Of course, and I know perfectly well what will occur, if he gives way. My brother will go home, become enthralled by his wife, and we shall all of us suffer in consequence."

"Pray, do not include me," answered Miss Flower, with an air which she meant should be dignified and proud, but which bore so much of malignity about it, that Sir Robert, occupied as he was, perceived it.

He looked at her with anger. Nothing would please him so much as to "spoil her sport," as he mentally called it, though she would know all the time he was acting the old proverb, "cutting off his nose to spite his face!" But if he decided for Marion's welfare—would it not be in direct opposition to his own? If he said one word, one little word, he might return to England, a free and unembarrassed man for years. There was a delicious pleasure in the thought, no more worries or fears, or speculations. In four

years, he might regain everything—increase his fortune. Mrs. Trevor would then be about wishing to return home; he also would then swear and forswear himself for Marion's sake, and leave nothing undone to see her righted. But Miss Flower would triumph, and how would Marion bear those four years, the good angel was whispering loudly, in melodious pleading tones.

"Good night, Mrs. Trevor," said Miss Flower; "not having a servant, it is time that I should go and pack up again."

"Wherefore?" asked Mrs. Trevor, tremulously.

"We shall all be dispersed to-morrow. I cannot longer be a burden to you. If Mr. Asheton permits it, I shall take advantage of his escort to return to England myself; and you know his movements are rapid—we shall have our 'marching orders' at dawn."

Mrs. Trevor looked piteously at Sir Robert;

a knock at the door startled them all. This time it was Mr. Asheton's own valet. "He begged pardon, his master feared the courier had not given a right message about an immediate answer. His master was still far from well, nervous and irritable."

"I had better, yes, I think I will—I will answer the letter in person," said Sir Robert.

"Pardon me, Mr. Asheton's particular orders, would see no one. A letter was the only answer."

"Wait a moment outside then, or go back to Mr. Asheton, and say, Sir Robert has only just been furnished with pen and ink."

"Thank you, sir; that will be better; he will only fret until I return."

"Now, Robert," began Mrs. Trevor, anxiously.

"Well, what do you wish me to say?" he answered, pettishly

"I don't know," said Mrs. Trevor, help-

lessly, the tears beginning to fall; she had never felt so like a woman before.

"Tell Mr. Asheton, you are no judge of his feelings—that you must have an interview in the morning; then you will tell everything, and he can decide for himself;" thus spoke Miss Flower.

Had Sir Robert looked up, he would have seen an eager anxious look in her eyes, that might have warned him of some peril in her council.

"Yes, yes—excellent," exclaimed Mrs. Trevor; "give me at least one night of rest, after all I have undergone."

"I agree, upon one condition," said Sir Robert: "I may tell Godfrey whatever I like to-morrow."

"Of course," answered his sister-in-law.

"We shall be able to corroborate all you wish," said Miss Flower, with a careless, indifferent air. Sir Robert wrote as she dictated, and

without giving himself time to read over his note, sealed and dispatched it.

They wait for half-an-hour, in case of another message, but none was sent, even though Sir Robert went himself to inquire at the next house.

"They all appeared to have gone, or were going, to bed," said he, when he returned.

"We had better do the same. I know Trevor has been in bed this hour, little dreaming of my suffering;—we meet at breakfast."

This they did, Mrs. Trevor appearing last.

"Have you heard from my brother?"

"No; but I see a letter for you on the mantel-piece." She took it up; it inclosed nothing but a bank post bill for 500*l*.

"What can be the meaning of this?"

"He has gone—he has left." As Mrs. Trevor and Miss Flower uttered these words simultaneously, Sir Robert rushed out of the room. His

face told its own tale, when he returned. The next house was empty, not a stray article left to indicate who had been there, or to betoken that they had departed in a hurry. The *Milor Anglais* had left no word of where he was going—had made no declaration of his plans—had delivered no message for any one. He placed the letter on the mantel-piece himself, and had gone as the day dawned.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MOURNFUL VIGIL.

THE three conspirators sat silent and confounded. Mr. Trevor made a fourth in the group, only different in being amazed, as well as silent, and not confounded at all.

"Where has he gone?" whispered Mrs. Trevor, as if she feared the sound of her own voice.

"Not to England, that's all I know," answered Sir Robert.

He was beginning to recover; his natural

elasticity of spirits rose, now that a certain pressure was removed.

"It is no fault of mine now," thought he; "I meant to have explained everything to-day fully, most fully, and exonerated Marion in every way. I should have detailed to him how well she has conducted herself; how prudent, how good, kind, sensible she is; yes, I should have told him the whole of my mind, but as he would not stay to hear it, of course it is no business of mine now. I can do no more. The leaving behind one of the English servants was rather lucky than otherwise, for, without it, he so concealed his route, we should not have known that he refused to accompany them, because they were to travel still, instead of going home. I must start off back again;—but who is to tell Marion? I won't; poor dear thing, what will she do? Really, how could I be such a brute as not to think of her first? Upon my

soul, I can't and won't tell her—it is too much to ask anyone to do."

In his excitement, Sir Robert spoke the last words aloud.

"I shall tell her," said Miss Flower, a little cruel gleam taking possession of her eyes, instead of the blank dismay that had filled them before.

Sir Robert's heart smote him.

"We must talk that over, Beatrice. I will not have her feelings hurt."

"I intend to return as soon as I hear of an escort," she answered, as unheeding him.

"When you go, I shall go," he muttered.

"What are we to do, Trevor?" asked his lady, meekly.

"Dearest Ellinor, we will do—we will go—we will remain—we will in every way conform to your wishes," answered he, flattered by this tender mark of confidence.

"But I have no wishes," said she, tartly.

"Shall we go home, love?"

"We can't."

"Shall we stay here?"

"I suppose we must. My brother has, I presume, left me this sum of money because of the great inconvenience to which his extraordinary flight has put us. I should wish to mourn for my poor dear mother in retirement. After breakfast, therefore, you will do well to go and seek for some small cottage or *châlet* that will hold us, and take it for three months. I would follow my brother, but that I think it desirable not to suffer our girls to have further intercourse with his children. They are most objectionable in their habits."

Before the evening had closed, they were settled in a *châlet*, small, but fresh and clean. Sir Robert was gone, and Miss Flower was to follow the next day, escorted by George, the English footman, who had declined further travels in the serviture of Mr. Asheton.

Beatrice did not hurry; she was pretty confident Sir Robert would not face Marion by himself.

Men are mostly cowards where feeling is concerned, and to some of them the sight of their bitterest enemy is not so painful as a woman in tears. Sir Robert was one of these; and as his heart grew heavier every hour that he approached nearer to England, even his last bit of consolation, that he had been uttering to himself the whole way, failed him.

"It is all his own doing, he ought to have let me have that interview. Yes, but instead of being here, I ought to have been there, following him until I found him, and then undeceiving him."

Thus it was with a guilty heart, the look of a criminal, and an ever-repeated fit of nervous trepidation, that Sir Robert Fane drove up to the Woodhead.

For the life of him, he could not go to Asheton Court alone. If Beatrice was not arrived, and he trusted she was not, he should get Mr. Flower to come with him—though what to say when he arrived there, he was utterly unable to decide.

Meantime, let us go to Asheton Court, and see how Marion has borne this time of sorrow and expectation.

After the reverent and loving manner in which she had closed the eyes of her who would have died alone and childreft but for the once despised daughter-in-law, Marion, unable to sleep, or rest, for thinking of those so far away, who ought to have been so near, arranged her disordered dress, refreshing her weary frame with cold ablutions, and sitting down by Edward's bedside, read all the loving words of her Lord, promising such blessings to those who die in the faith. When he awoke, she gently broke the intelligence to

him, that no more would the kind grandmamma kiss and bless him;—she was gone to his own mamma, the one being whom he had loved.

Anxious to fix upon his volatile mind a due impression of the true meaning of death, Marion bid him rise, and come with her into the garden, where they would gather flowers to place upon all that remained of his grandmother, the only duty he could now perform for her.

Awe-stricken and alarmed, Edward received impressions in his visits to the chamber of death, which they decorated with fresh flowers every day, that were never effaced.

"See," said Marion, "these flowers are like the dead. They die, but their seeds are put into the ground, and they rise again as beautiful as ever. But we are much more so, for we are stamped with the image of God."

"Shall I see my mother as she was when she left me."

"Yes; but much more beautiful, happy,

holy, and bright,—no more pain or sickness will she endure."

"I would not be that, Aunt May," pointing to the bed; "I would wish to fly up to heaven at once, as I am."

"What, and take this little sickly body that sometimes aches, is liable to accidents, is filled with naughtinesses, to heaven, where all is bright, good, and pure. Oh, no, Edward, let us leave our clay dwellings behind, and take the angel forms that God has prepared for those who love Him.

These conversations took place every day; and from the date of them may be traced a dawning of good in the mind of a most wayward boy.

Dragged into the presence of death roughly and suddenly, he might have imbibed fatal ideas of the goodness and mercy of the great Father of us all. But soothed and strengthened by the words and example of his Aunt

Marion, he took into his childish heart solemn and lasting ideas of the end of this life, the power he held within him to mitigate its terrors, yet the weakness which instigated him to pray for succour to retain that power; in addition to these thoughts, was the inevitableness of death—there was no escape.

Well was it for Marion she had this work to do, and the reward given her of seeing the good seed taking root. For she mourned after her mother, so suddenly snatched from her; and she carried within her heart a nameless fear, caused by the words of Julian—those words that had killed her mother. She would not permit herself to dwell upon them. They were not true, they were the ravings of insanity. Poor Mrs. Asheton had been startled by his vehemence, alarmed at his manner more than his words, yet they bore on the face of them a certain colour, likening them to that clause in the settlements. How could Julian

have learnt that, or, learning it, have retained it in his shattered brain? No more, no more; she must not think of it. Every day might bring her the contradiction.

A week passed. Her mother was now hid from her sight, enclosed within that narrow bed that sufficeth for us all at last, whether we be richer or poorer. There is no distinction except that of outward adornment. Another week went by. Marion arose on the day appointed for the funeral, in that state of quiescent grief that is the result of strong fortitude. Yet she knew how frail were the bands that held the throbbing heart —how little would break them. When that sad day was passed, and she lay down to rest at night, weary and sick at heart, she rightly judged she owed such feeling to the thought of the grief her husband would feel that his mother was dead and buried, and he not there to mourn her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW REVENGE IS LESS SWEET TO THE TASTE THAN TO THE IMAGINATION.

Miss Flower had already arrived at the Woodhead, yet she had had no triumph, she was too late. Repellent and disdainful she confronted her fellow-criminal; he, ashamed and pitiful, hardly dare look up.

"He wrote to her himself," she said, as in answer to his look.

"No, no," sobbed Mrs. Flower, who was sitting in a dark corner, indulging in what she called "a good cry," "the letter was to Mr. Hearn, the agent. In it he gave directions

for a tomb over his father and mother, a few other requests about money, an order to pay Mrs. Asheton two thousand a year, with the liberty of remaining at Asheton Court, and a promise that once in three months she should hear of her children's health. A cruel, cruel letter. Oh, oh!"

"What did Marion say?" asked Sir Robert, almost in a whisper.

"I have not seen her," answered Beatrice; "she will see no one. You would do well to send to her."

"Do you think so, Mrs Flower?" asked Sir Robert, his voice trembling and weak.

"Oh, oh—dear, dear, how can I tell? Cruel, bad man; I wish he was dead, and Mr. Flower thinks that so wrong of me. You see, 'tis all true."

"What is true, mamma? You have said that to me a dozen times, and yet I cannot discover what you mean."

"Don't be vexed, dear Beatrice; do not be angry. Prissy knows it, I think. I can't be sure. It's what Julian said."

Being as anxious to know as Beatrice, Sir Robert half guessed the truth, and afterwards the whole was made clear in a conversation with Prissy.

"All she said was, Sir Robert, when she had read the letter to Mr. Hearn, 'Then Count Julian was right; he meditated this step.' And since then she has never said another word. I have not seen her, indeed she won't let me, nor will she see you, I know, and she'll die. I know she will; and I will go before any judge and swear she is murdered; and the only pleasure I ever shall have again is in seeing Mr. Asheton hanged for the murder; there now."

Prissy's indignation and disgust grew with the hours.

Sir Robert walked up to Asheton Court.

He saw his son, from whom he could gain little information. He was scared and bewildered, but appeared to regard his father with rather more interest than usual. The mention of his Aunt Marion made him cry.

"Is she so ill, Edward?" demanded his father.

"Oh, papa, papa, her face is like my mamma's before she was taken away from me. If she becomes dead, if she goes away to heaven, oh! what shall I do?—who will love me any more?"

"Go up to her, Edward, and tell her to keep a good heart; all will end well."

During Edward's absence, he went to find Stephenson, Mrs. Asheton's maid, who he heard was yet in the house.

Very sad and piteous was her account.

"To think, sir, that a gentleman so proud and so just should act thus by one of

the sweetest ladies living. We feel sure, all we servants, that some underhand work has tampered with his own right judgment and good heart. And it shall be through no fault of ours that our young madam is not speedily made happy. We all intend, sir, to come forward; even if we lose our places, we shall speak up for the dear lady."

"You remain here, then."

"Yes, Sir Robert; Pinner has gone. And even if I have no wages, I mean to remain—the young madam ever in my sight—until the return of Mr. Asheton. No one shall say she is not guarded and cared for. Though I have lived for thirty years with the Ashetons, Sir Robert, love them as I may, I respect none more than my young mistress."

"Does Mr. Asheton give any reason for not returning, or hope of eventually doing so?"

"Neither one nor the other, Sir Robert; and that is why I think some evil-disposed person, for a private end, has taken advantage of his whims (for he has plenty of them) to separate him from his wife. Strongly as he may wish to have his children to himself, unless some other influence worked upon him, I don't think he could have been cruel enough to leave her alone here in this heartless manner."

"I heard the Count di Ramiano said something."

"Well, so he did, sir; he told Dr. Ford before me, Mr. Asheton never meant to return; he was only waiting his mother's death, to make arrangements for never returning to England again; and if he told that to my poor dead mistress, Madam Asheton, no wonder it killed her. But he raved so, I did not think it needful to regard him."

"How could he have obtained such an idea?"

"Goodness knows, Sir Robert; and there was something about a settlement. But he is gone, and I trust is safe in a madhouse. Better feelings will touch Mr. Asheton shortly, and then all will come right. Meantime, Sir Robert, we are all thankful to have Master Fane. He is the only person that can rouse her, for she is stunned with grief. She hears his least word, and attends to every wish, but she takes no notice of us, and would eat nothing, but for him; and he is very good and thoughtful, far beyond what we might expect. We all think that the trouble and care she had with him will be now returned to her. He may be the means, with God's blessing, of preserving her health and reason under this bitter blow."

"I trust so. Can you think of any means by which I could serve her?"

"None at present, Sir Robert; we must let the first shock be softened to her by the power of the Almighty. None else can comfort her. But should I know of anything by and bye, I will be sure to write."

"Do; on you I rely. Remember, there is nothing, no trouble, no labour, no sacrifice, I would not make for her."

(But one, Sir Robert.)

Stephenson having thanked and promised him, he departed to the house of one of his numerous friends, there to drown his remorse (if he had any) in the excitements he loved so well, and to indulge which he had perilled so much.

Very shadowy and changed was Marion when she issued forth from the secluded chamber of a woful struggle with life and death.

Brought by the faithful servants of an unjust master to the sea-shore, accompanied by

the affectionate Edward, in the hope that the healthy breeze would tinge her white cheek with a colour, no matter how faint, they placed her on the rock, that memorable rock on which she had first seen her husband. Not that they knew it, yet were they glad to see some emotion flitting over the hitherto impassive face, and imputed it to the sight of scenes she had loved and valued.

Day by day they brought her to the same spot, and though their hopes of rousing her to further exertions, to stronger health, ended as yet in disappointment, they persisted in the plan as the best they could do for her.

Stephenson and Payne always accompanied her, the coachman waiting with the carriage at some little distance, or slowly driving up and down, until her increasing palor warned them that she was tired. Tenderly they took her back again. Beatrice had gone down to speak to her the first day she was brought.

Jealously as Stephenson would have guarded her from intrusion, she hardly liked to forbid her own family approaching her; but after having given notice that Miss Flower was near, and receiving no reply, there was nothing further to be done.

Beatrice did not come often. Marion's grief was of a kind inexplicable to her; it was too quiescent. She might be revenged, but it was after a sort that left her in a condition less enviable than that of her victim.

A stormy, indignant, retaliating bitterness she had desired to excite, that would feed her wrath with the very mode of expressing it, until Reason would be overthrown, and Marion would prove her own destroyer. But this pale, motionless, unresisting victim irritated the fiery temper of Beatrice more than any other state could have done. Meantime, as sure as the carriage appeared on the sands,

so surely did one warm, faithful little heart rush down to be seated on the rock in time to welcome her darling May. And there would Prissy sit in pleasant patience, thinking herself supremely happy and overpaid if May showed the ghost of a smile on seeing her. But if she spoke, Prissy's exultation was boundless.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIR ROBERT HAS A CHANCE GIVEN HIM TO REPENT.

Sir Robert Fane had besought Prissy to write to him, but he began to tire of the one incessant theme, and the same sad tale never varying.

"Why do you not rouse her indignation, my dear Priscilla?" wrote he in answer. "Urge her to go out, visit, and receive visitors. I'll stake any sum you like to name, that she will soon become the most popular person in the county. Every one

will take up her cause, and Asheton will hear of it, and of the position she holds in the neighbourhood, and be thoroughly ashamed of having doubted her."

Prissy's answer was characteristic, and warned Sir Robert he had let out more than he intended.

"Doubted her indeed! What is all that about, I should like to know? What is there to doubt concerning May. If there are any doubts going about, I'll write to Mr. Asheton myself. We won't wait for any hearsaying. But I suppose you must have made some mistake. I shall not give May your advice. First, because I don't agree in it; and, secondly, because I know she won't follow it. But she is getting a little better at last. Papa wrote such a sermon. Mamma was nearly a fortnight choosing the text. It was out of Job—second chapter, tenth verse —and described all his sufferings and losses;

really I was like to cry over Job and all he went through, papa preached so pathetically about him. Then mamma asked May what she thought of it; and she answered, 'It was a good sermon.' 'Job was more tried than you, my dear,' says mamma. 'Not so,' answered May; 'his children were safe in heaven, and of what use were his riches without them?"

"So, you see, she hears and thinks, both good things. But oh, Sir Robert, listen to this" (Prissy always wrote as if she was speaking), "that odd woman, the Lady Superior, comes after her every day; she prays aloud, so that May can hear her; and when May said, in answer to one of her questions, 'I would be comforted' (oh, so sadly she said it, I burst out crying, because I really could not help it), she was so conceited as to say, 'She would comfort her directly, if she followed her directions.'

And what a jargon she kept up; I could not make out a word of sense, but that she called May ungrateful and an idolater, merely because she said she loved the south wind because it touched her children's cheeks and lips ere it came to her, and she was grateful to God for the sun; it shone on them and her perhaps at the same time. Such pretty ideas—so like May! But I have no opinion of your hard, stony women, that dress very odd, and have harsh voices. They don't feel, except when they have not a good dinner."

Prissy enjoyed her correspondence with Sir Robert Fane so much, that she omitted no opportunity of writing, which may account for the weariness, not to say wrath, with which he read them. The one never-wearying detail of Marion's grief and desolate ways was placed before him in every possible phase, so that he began to accuse his innocent

correspondent of a great deal more cleverness than even we, her devoted admirers, can credit her with; imagining she was heaping retribution on his erring head.

As if her letters were not sufficient, he received about this time one from Mr. Hearn, asking his advice regarding a very delicate subject, no less than Mrs. Asheton's refusal to use the money appointed by Mr. Asheton for her sole benefit.

"When I took her the draft for the first quarter," wrote he, "she was seated, as usual, in the window of poor Mrs. Asheton's parlour, in her accustomed sad, forlorn manner. Indeed, Sir Robert—excuse the remark—I cannot look at her without tears; such a wife—such a mother—and thus left. Honourable and just as Mr. Asheton has always proved himself to be, nothing will induce me to believe but that some very evil and fatal influence has been

about him, of which we know nothing. We all look to you, sir, as the one to right her. You have but to prove to Mr. Asheton the injustice of leaving her thus young and bereft, and he will not think his life-time sufficient to make it up. But if you will be good enough to come down to Asheton Court, I can talk that over with you and Mr. Flower, whose supineness is very reprehensible. At present, I must return to my first remark. I took Mrs. Asheton the draft; she looked at it, asked me the meaning of it, and upon hearing it, tore it in halves, without other words than :— 'Return Mr. Asheton his money; I have sufficient of my own for my wants.' Now, sir, I know not what to do. You remember Mr. Asheton allows of no infringement of his rules. I fear to do mischief by sending the message, and making what is bad still worse between them. I have made inquiries, and I find that Mrs. Asheton lives in

that splendid house more simply and rigorously than an anchorite, paying the housekeeper scrupulously for everything she uses. I believe her own money is under three hundred a year, and as she keeps her pony to ride with Master Fane, and abates none of her charities, she has nothing left for luxuries. She accepts the kindly offices of the servants (who adore her) quite in the same spirit with which they are offered, for she has a noble heart, which is ever ready to judge nobly. I beg you will come down and use your influence with her, or advise me, &c., &c."

Sir Robert's nerves would not permit him to go and see the devastation he had caused.

So he wrote a very eloquent letter instead, with not only various good and cogent reasons for her taking this money, but a few maxims of worldly advice, such as "she had a right to double as much, and it would be a good plan to show Asheton what a star she

was in the world. For with two thousand a year for her own use, and no house to keep up, she could command any station in society, &c., &c." In fact, he quite warmed into enthusiasm about her, and settled that the Duchess should present her, the Countess should be a mother to her, and all the world would and must rave about her. Great, therefore, was his disappointment when he received the answer:—

"DEAR SIR ROBERT,

"I have the misfortune to bear Mr. Asheton's name. That is sufficient misery, without the insult of being pensioned by him. As the mother of his children, I live in their and my home.

"Your true sister,

"MARION ASHETON."

But the disappointment gave way to an enthusiastic admiration of her decision.

"The very queen of trumps is she. Now, though I am a very indifferent fellow as regards women, not being able to appreciate their little sensibilities and whimsicalities, yet she's a splendid creature. One might reckon oneself on the right road to all that's good if he had one in harness. And very willing to go too, no one would jib with her. If I had had the luck now—but hold, you consummate blockhead, if you had been the only man left in the world, she would not have looked at you. I don't, in fact, regard her as a woman. From the very first moment when she startled me so by her fair appearance, I have never thought of her as belonging to the same nature as we have. I suppose I must go down and settle about this money; I am very loathe, and where is the good? We none of us know where Asheton has hid himself. We can't advise him of her determination. I wish to heaven I had four

thousand a year for life; I would find Asheton before a week was out. The very queen of trumps—am I the knave?"

It will be seen by this colloquy, Sir Robert Fane's conscience was extremely troublesome. Meantime, after hesitating for some weeks, he did at last obey Mr. Hearn's request.

He went first to Mr. Hearn, then to Mr. Flower, exchanged a couple of dark looks with his coadjutor, Miss Flower, and while wondering of what materials Mr. Flower was really composed, so placid and well content was he with himself and all the world, spite of Mr. Hearn's eloquent appeal regarding the fading health and forlorn condition of his niece, he went down to see Marion seated on her rock.

Beatrice watched him. In less than ten minutes she saw him rapidly turn back again, and the next she heard of him was that he was gone altogether. She smiled her bitter

smile. He had fled, unable to witness the work of his own hands. He had fled, no doubt horrified—but he was safe to tell no tales. If he had really repented, he would have remained to gain strength to do it, from the sight of his victim. But he fled, and all was safe. Yet Marion was regaining strength and colour. But with them came a strange perception of her wrongs. Composed as her nature was, of feelings essentially gentle and soft, the desolation of her state was the harder to bear. She had no fears for her children. To keep them, to consider them wholly his own, Mr. Asheton had sacrificed her. They were not likely to be unhappy, or to be harshly treated. Their danger lay more in the other extreme. She had therefore only to feel for herself, and as the future rolled itself out to her mental vision, hard and unnatural grew the thoughts of her heart. Cold, supine, no kind thought emanated from her, no con-

solation touched her, no mark of tenderness moved her. She did her duty by Edward scrupulously, and was always affectionate to him. She returned Prissy's kisses, and sometimes spoke to her. But upon all the rest of the world she gazed with vacant lacklustre eyes, too woful to have even the pang of anguish in them.

No wonder Sir Robert fled, the remembrance of that sad face might have haunted him to some good;—but his services were suddenly required elsewhere.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. ASHETON BUYS SOME EXPERIENCE AT AN EXORBITANT AND RATHER BITTER PRICE.

MARION was not the only sufferer. As if touched in one night by the sudden infliction of a ten years' struggle with life, Godfrey Asheton wandered upon a far distant shore, quite as unhappy, and almost as lonely as Marion.

On the first spur of an extraordinary, inevitable decision, he had speeded away from his own kith and kin, with no other thought

than to rid himself of their presence. He had neither time to waste in grief, nor leisure to examine his present feelings, by the test of reason and common sense. His children were his second object; after this one imperative necessity was accomplished, making direct for the coast, he hired a small steamer, by means of which he cruised up and down the shores of the Mediterranean, looking out for a secluded but beautiful spot where he could hide himself and his children, at least for sufficient time to enable his reason and health to recover; both of which he felt to be deeply shaken.

Touched by the honest nature and simple good sense of the consul at Carrara, whose kindly words, just sufficient and no more, were the first English words that had greeted his ears since his flight, the desolate Godfrey Asheton clung to the man as to a friend. He lingered there until this feeling became so strong, he took him somewhat into his counsels; and con-

fessing his desire to lead a quiet, uninterrupted life, wholly occupied by the education and care of his children, and as far apart as possible from intercourse with the rest of the world, besought his assistance to find him an abode.

This the consul gladly consented to do, as much because it was a great boon to him to have an English family near, as because the liking between him and Mr. Asheton was mutual; especially also did he, a determined old bachelor, delight in and love Mr. Asheton's beautiful children. Dismissing their floating home, and settling in a sort of villa that had belonged to some rich and noble follower of the art of sculpture, and bore about it all the marks of their near vicinity to the famed quarries of the finest marble in the world, Mr. Asheton wrote for a tutor and governess, already known to, and employed before by him, to complete his party.

This villa had a singular situation. Flat around it, and close to the sea, there rose up, on all sides, grey mountains, of a colour almost ethereal. It was no stretch of the imagination to suppose that within their vast bosoms, they contained nothing but pure white marble, whose spotless brilliancy shone through the light covering of nature. Blending with this grey tint were great groups of olive trees, diversified by clusters of little villages, placed upon every little pinnacle or hill, far and near.

The villa itself was by no means convenient or picturesque. But it had a recommendation in Mr. Asheton's eyes that redeemed it from all faults. It was embosomed in olive, orange, and vine trees, and in defiance of English neatness, appeared deserted and empty. Thus, should any visitor from England chance to find themselves at Carrara, actuated by curiosity, there was nothing about the house that would tempt them to ask, "Who lives there?"

Freed from the one fear of encountering any of his belongings, Mr. Asheton set himself diligently to work, to arrange his house and his children's studies. He did not think he could be traced, for, independent of the fact that the owners of the steamvessel had not suceeded in comprehending his name, they had not been able to navigate the vessel further than Spezzia, and even then, had to go out to sea for safety, when the wind blew towards shore. So they knew nothing but that their further services were not required.

Mr. Asheton had been meditating a separation from his sister for some time. The old adage, that "Poverty makes one acquainted with strange bed-fellows," might be enlarged with much truth into "travelling developes strange humours." Mrs. Trevor travelling, was very different to Mrs. Trevor at home, and her brother's eyes were being opened to

the fact that his favourite sister, the clever, talented Ellinor, was a querulous and somewhat ignorant woman, who talked a great deal more than she thought. He might not perhaps have arrived at this conclusion so soon, but for his children. The strict truth, whether pleasing or not, they spoke, without reference to any one. Consequently, many unpleasant scenes occurred between them and their aunt and cousins, which did not at all redound to the credit of any party. The Asheton children were impertinent and rude; Mrs. Trevor violent and irrational; the Miss Trevors feeble and deceitful.

Moreover, it began to grate with an unpleasant sharpness upon Godfrey Asheton's nerves, the constant obloquy thrown upon the name of Flower, which, whenever the children did wrong (and that was as certain as that they entered their aunt's presence), was invariably the salve poured over the wounds

they inflicted on Mrs. Trevor's feelings. She forgot that there is blistering salve as well as soothing, and perceived not the irritating sore she was daily opening in her brother's heart.

Mr. Trevor, too, proved, upon constant intercourse, to be utterly deficient in every quality calculated to make an intelligent companion. Setting aside the natural indignation Godfrey could not but feel at the subterfuges to which he resorted to deceive his wife and aid his daughters, he longed to be rid of his presence.

Like mouldering damp, Mr. Trevor appeared to Godfrey to infect every place into which he entered with deceit and blundering stupidity. He never gave a straightforward answer; he was slow, yet not sure; he was always making great efforts, and never known to be ready; —deprecatory, fawning, cringing—the most inefficient, helpless, meagre specimen of a man that could well be conceived. That refined

and intelligent intercourse promised by Mrs. Trevor to her brother, was never so far from his grasp as at the period when she had him entirely to herself. Every day brought its paltry grievances, which, insignificant in themselves, were yet sufficient to mar the enjoyment of the present hour. Every day Godfrey hoped that the vexations of the previous one would leave intact the present one, and each day he was the sport of his hopes. Mrs. Trevor was incapable by nature of enjoying the life of which she had painted such vivid pictures. Her mind was small, and given to petty trifles—mounted on the stilts of imagination, she tottered and fell over, glad to find herself on the safe ground of the commonest earth.

Thus, when left to the society of Mr. and Mrs. Trevor's essence of refinement, as it was supposed to be, his sister would have been utterly chagrined had she seen into his heart.

He not only regretted the society he had despised at Asheton Court, but recalled the many traits of his forsaken Marion's love and intelligence, with an earnestness that portrayed how she gained in the contrast.

In fact, but one thing had prevented his return home six months before. And that was the children themselves.

They bore no resemblance now to the healthy, rosy, lively children he had brought from England eighteen months before.

The variety of teachers by whom they had been surrounded, the many changes in their attendants, Mr. Asheton's own personal ignorance of the habits and training of children, together with Mrs. Trevor's perversion of them, were all entirely detrimental to their health and manners. It is true, they knew a vast number of things that were surprising for their age. They could deliver a message in four different languages; they could pass very

fluent opinions upon sculpture, painting, and literature, somewhat after the fashion of parrots; yet they were ignorant of the most common every-day knowledge. The fruits of the ground, the names of trees, the signs of the heavens, the order of time, the simplest geography, all these, being considered unworthy the notice of young Ashetons, they were left to pick up anyhow. But this ignorance was not so detrimental to them as the custom Mr. Asheton had adopted of their being his companions. Prematurely brought forward, keeping the same hours that he did, attending the same meals, in his hurry to render them the companions he longed for, he forgot they were yet children. Pedantic, conceited, overfed, overdressed little men and women, nothing but their innate, frank, and original characteristics saved them from being extremely disagreeable. And while their father acknowledged to himself there

must be some radical fault in his management, he was wholly at a loss to conjecture from what it proceeded. That they had no control over their wayward tempers surprised him, though he was sufficiently just not to impute it to the taint of the Flower blood, as his sister did. He had not yet learned from experience that anyone with Asheton blood in his veins could be passionate, imperious pettish—the three prevailing tempers of his three children. Therefore they reigned in high force over the little unfortunates, who, privileged from birth, were not supposed to need a guiding hand, a gentle rule, and a firm coercion.

Italian attendants were about the worst they could have. Companions, such as their cousins, the Trevors, fostered all the besetting sins of the young Ashetons, they despsed them so much; while the aggravating manners of their aunt were still worse.

In fact, three more troublesome, contumacious children seldom fall to the lot of one parent's guidance, and Mr. Asheton secretly longed for an opportunity to restore them to their mother, though he had not as yet allowed this even to himself. He was worried that they looked so pale; he was annoyed that they were so naughty; he was shocked that they used such language, which was none the less pungent because it was foreign; and he felt powerless even to understand to what it was all owing.

There was nothing that he had neglected. Had he not forsworn his home, left his mother, deserted his wife, been made miserable abroad? Was he not, the fastidious Godfrey Asheton, almost a nurse—troubled with washing bills, administrator of physic, wardrobe-keeper in ordinary—and all this for three children, who, so far from rewarding him, grew more troublesome, more disappointing every day?

These were Mr. Asheton's feelings while he lived with his sister Ellinor; and it was neither unjust nor unkind in him to impute a great deal of this annoyance to her.

He longed for Marion to write and beseech him to come home, he could endure the separation no longer. He even began to feel hurt and accuse her of heartlessness. And as he did so, his evil genius might have whispered it "was strange, passing strange," she did not. Hence arose that one fatal confidence to Sir Robert, the little small speck that alone tarnished the bright shield of a noble nature—above suspicion—incapable of mistrust.

Now it was accomplished. The separation from his sister was completed — his arrangements regarding his children were all good, and already bearing fruit. In the midst of a weight of woe that he was at first incapable of realising, he had this one drop of comfort—the children were already benefiting by the sepa-

ration from their aunt; their hours were more consonant with their age, the sea breezes had given them a little colour, and partly unconscious of it themselves, the trouble expressed in their father's countenance softened their wayward moods: they forgot their own grievances in awe of his.

For day by day, hour by hour, grew upon him the full measure of his anguish.

His mother, the mother from whom he had scarcely ever been separated until the last two years of his life—the mother so identified with everything that was happiest and best in that life—was gone, nevermore to return. And her death strange and sudden. However much he felt that he had not been there to hear her last words, sooth her dying pillow, all was lost sight of in the agony that she was slain—by what? A slander! Was it a slander? She had not died else. Herself the most honoured of Asheton matrons—not a

word—a breath—a slur was ever known to be upon that name she bore so fondly, loved so well, and rightly, as became her, she died as it was whispered.

Thus did Mr. Asheton feed his misery and ncrease his suspicions. It was enough that his mother had heard and died. It was more than sufficient; his brother-in-law, cognisant of everything, had not, though a man of the world, of more easy virtue than any Asheton, been able to proffer one word in extenuation. He had desired to have his children all to himself —their sole parent. Was it to punish him for the error which he was just so painfully discovering, that God had inflicted upon him the heaviest of all human ills? And the saddest, weariest, most degrading thing of all was, that far up upon those ethereal mountains, higher still in the clear, calm night sky, with all its throbbing stars, down again within the park trees, floating up for ever from the very

depths of the clear sea, came the gentle, loving face of Marion. And he felt that he had never loved her so well as now, when she was lost to him for ever.

END OF VOL. II.

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